

The Mount Vernon Plan

A Comprehensive Plan for Mount Vernon, Iowa



*Prepared with the
Citizens of the City of Mount Vernon*

*by
RDG Crose Gardner Shukert*

September, 1995

THE MOUNT VERNON PLAN



The authors gratefully acknowledge the support, friendship, and commitment of the citizens of Mount Vernon. We would like to express special gratitude to the members of the Planning Coordinating Committee, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the City Council, for lending their time and vision to this effort. Jackie Martin as chairperson of the Planning Coordinating Committee, offered the leadership and insight necessary to create a great plan for a great town. Mayor Rick Elliott and Planning and Zoning Commission Chairs Abbi Swanson and Sandra Harman also provided special leadership throughout the planning process. City Administrator Michael Beimer was also generous in sharing his time, knowledge, and expertise with us. We appreciate the efforts of these people and others, and are excited about the future of this extraordinary town.

■ Mayor

Rick Elliott

■ Mayor Pro tempore

William Heywood

■ City Council

Myrt Bowers
Alan Griffith
William Heywood
Diane Hoffmann
Wes Whitley

■ Planning and Zoning Committee

Bernie Bowman
Dave Dunn
Sandra Harman, Chair
Gene Hinman
David Lyon
Dick Peterson
Abbi Swanson
Jackie Martin
Patricia Zilk

■ City Administrator/Clerk

Michael R. Beimer

■ City Engineer

Steve Vanderah,
Shoemaker and Haaland
Coralville, Iowa

■ City Attorney

Frank Nidey

■ Zoning Administrator

Rich Cregar

■ The Mount Vernon Plan Coordinating Committee

Michael R. Beimer
Ann Booth
Myrt Bowers
Loyd Brown
Dave Dunn
Rick Elliott
Ed Fordyce
Emily Haas
Mike Haggerty
Sandra Harman
Dennis Herrick
William Heywood
Gene Hinman
Diane Hoffmann
Tom Hope
Truman Jordan
Patricia Zilk
Ann Krogmann
Jackie Martin, Chair
Ellen McGinnis
John McGinnis
Ginna Owens
Dick Peters
Dick Peterson
Larry Petrick
John Pospisil
Mary Proctor
Lorna Reinerts
Adrian Ringold
Ed Sauter
Mike Smith
Abbi Swanson
Wendy Tripp
Ivan Vonk
Wes Whitley
Mark Winder

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| An Introduction to the Mount Vernon Plan | 1 |
| Theme One: A Profile of Mount Vernon | 14 |
| Theme Two: A Timeless City | 32 |
| Town Patterns | 36 |
| Challenges | 41 |
| A Development Constitution | 45 |
| Theme Three: Growth and Land Use | 56 |
| Goals | 57 |
| Existing Land Use | 59 |
| Comparison with Other Towns | 63 |
| Land Use Trends | 65 |
| Land Use Projections | 69 |
| Land Use Policies | 74 |
| Existing Housing | 91 |
| Housing Characteristics and Conditions | 93 |
| Housing Policies | 103 |
| Future Land Use Map | after 112 |
| Theme Four: Traditional Town in a New Century | 114 |
| New Traditional Neighborhoods | 117 |
| First Avenue Corridor | 121 |
| First Street Civic Corridor | 124 |
| Commercial and Research Park | 126 |
| Green Network | 129 |
| Transportation that Reinforces Character | 134 |
| Theme Five: Uptown Mount Vernon | 138 |
| Goals | 140 |
| Historic Resources | 142 |
| Urban Design | 145 |
| Land and Building Use | 146 |
| Building Condition | 150 |
| Circulation and Parking | 151 |
| Uptown Development Plan | 156 |

INTRODUCTION



THE MOUNT VERNON PLAN



THE MOUNT VERNON PLAN: AN INTRODUCTION

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR MOUNT VERNON

Mount Vernon must direct and guide growth to preserve and enhance its traditional living environment and small-town quality of life.

Mount Vernon is a classic small college town making the transformation into a larger community. While this change offers great economic promise and opportunity, the city must ensure that growth occurs in harmony with those qualities which residents value.

The Mount Vernon Plan provides a comprehensive vision of the city's future, based on taking community actions to direct the pattern of future development to reinforce the present character of the city.

Iowa's cities find themselves in a changing social and economic environment. Mount Vernon has grown as a successful community in this environment. From its founding in 1847, Mount Vernon developed into a small but strong independent economic center. Like many communities, Mount Vernon's role in the region has become more specialized, and the city has attracted a significant number of residents who commute to employment in metropolitan Cedar Rapids, less than twenty miles to the northwest. Regional transportation improvements have drawn Mount Vernon closer to the pressures and prosperity of metropolitan living. Yet, the distinct quality of the built and human environment of

ROLES OF A PLAN

the city has thus far been preserved. As a center for education, commerce and living in its immediate region, Mount Vernon has substantial resources and amenities that will continue to attract people from Linn County and the nation. However, a rising proportion of these people seek to remain as residents in the community. There is a certain need to ensure that the city can accommodate additional population growth, managed in a context of quality urban development. A new vision of Mount Vernon can further assure that the city continues to grow in a way that is consistent with its values and traditions.

This comprehensive development plan for Mount Vernon has three fundamental purposes. First, it provides an essential legal basis for land use regulation such as zoning and subdivision control. Second, a modern comprehensive plan presents a unified and compelling vision for a community, derived from the aspirations of its citizens; and establishes the specific actions necessary to fulfill that vision. Finally, the plan is designed to fulfill the State of Iowa's far-sighted policy of encouraging the completion of Community Builder Plans, documents aimed at defining a strategic vision of a community's future.

■ The Legal Role

Communities prepare and adopt comprehensive plans for legal purposes. Cities adopt zoning and subdivision ordinances to promote the "health, safety, morals, or general welfare of the community." Land use regulations such as zoning ordinances recognize that people in a community live cooperatively and have certain responsibilities to one another. These regulations establish rules that govern how land is developed within a municipality and its extra-territorial jurisdiction.

However, cities may not adopt land use regulations without first adopting a comprehensive development plan. This requirement derives from the premise that land use decisions should not be arbitrary, but should follow an accepted and reasonable concept of how the city should grow. The Mount Vernon Plan, then, provides the ongoing legal basis for the

ROLES OF A PLAN

city's continuing regulation of land use and development.

In using this plan, it is important to recognize that the policies and recommendations contained within the plan are guidelines and targets for community development. Their implementation is phased and shaped by many factors over time. The plan is not meant to be a rigid blueprint, but is rather an initial, comprehensive policy direction which will be embellished and further shaped by future events. This plan should be viewed as a flexible tool, adapted and modified over time by the city to remain vital and relevant.

■ The Community Building Role

A comprehensive development plan has an even more significant role in the growth of a community than establishing a basis for zoning control. The plan establishes a picture of Mount Vernon's future, based on the participation of residents in the planning of their community. This vision is particularly crucial at this time in the community's history. Beyond defining a vision, the plan presents a unified action program that will implement the city's goals. Indeed, the plan is designed as a working document that both defines the future and provides a working program for realizing the city's great potential.

This plan is intended as the Community Builder Plan for the City of Mount Vernon, designed to qualify the city for state administered community and economic development assistance. The Community Builder Plan is a strategic document, designed to assess a community's current situation; carry out a community-based visioning process; and develop specific strategies to realize those visions. The Mount Vernon Plan, above all, is a strategic rather than abstract document, designed to identify and address Mount Vernon's major planning and development issues.

■ The Planning Process

The Mount Vernon Plan is the culmination of a planning process that involved citizens of the city to define its future. This process was managed by the Planning and Zoning

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Mount Vernon Plan, while a comprehensive plan for the city, is designed to satisfy the requirements of the Iowa Community Builder Plan for the City of Mount Vernon. The entire plan is strategic in nature, establishing overall goals for each of five themes and developing policies which implement these themes. The correspondence at right compares the components of the Community Builder Plan as set forth by the Iowa Department of Economic Development with the comparable sections in the Mount Vernon Plan.

The Mount Vernon Plan and the Community Builder Plan Guidelines: A Correspondence

| Community Builder Plan Component | Corresponding Mount Vernon Plan Sections | Page |
|----------------------------------|---|------|
| PUBLIC WORKS | Chapter 3: Growth and Land Use | 57 |
| | Chapter 6: Quality Public Services | 171 |
| HOUSING | Chapter 3: Growth and Land Use | 57 |
| | Chapter 4: Traditional Town in a New Century | 115 |
| PUBLIC SERVICES | Chapter 3: Growth and Land Use | 57 |
| | Chapter 4: Traditional Town in a New Century | 115 |
| | Chapter 6: Quality Public Services | 171 |
| | Chapter 7: Implementation | 223 |
| FINANCIAL CONDITIONS | Chapter 7: Implementation | 223 |
| ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT | Chapter 4: Traditional Town in a New Century | 115 |
| | Chapter 5: Uptown Mount Vernon | 139 |
| | Chapter 7: Implementation | 223 |
| STRATEGIC PLAN | Chapter 2: A Timeless City | 32 |
| | The entire structure of the plan was built on the foundation of a participatory strategic planning process. | |

THE PLANNING PROCESS • ASSESSMENT

Commission and a Planning Coordinating Committee which represented a wide range of interests in the community. The first part of the process involved a three-part strategic planning program, designed to assess the city's current position; establish visions and goals for Mount Vernon's twenty-year future; and consider an action program necessary to achieve that vision. Members of the community were invited to participate in the strategic planning process through a series of community workshops.

■ Assessment

In assessing the city's situation, participants defined the most important issues that would face Mount Vernon within the next five to ten years.

• *Identifying Community Planning Issues*

Participants identified the following issue areas as most crucial to the city:

- *Urban Design and Community Image*, including efficient and attractive commercial growth, the quality of new subdivision design, the design quality of important community streets, sign controls, historic preservation programs, visual and aesthetic quality, architectural design standards, and creation of a connected recreation and pedestrian trail system through town.

- *Management of Growth and Development*, including establishing agreement on the quantity of new development, defining a growth concept that provides adequate areas and direction for projected development, maintaining the quality of the traditional town, continuing good standards for new development, encouraging the development of multi-family housing on suitable sites, providing good sites for industry, increasing the impact of tourism on the local economy, and enhancing Uptown's role as a unique center and focus for community.

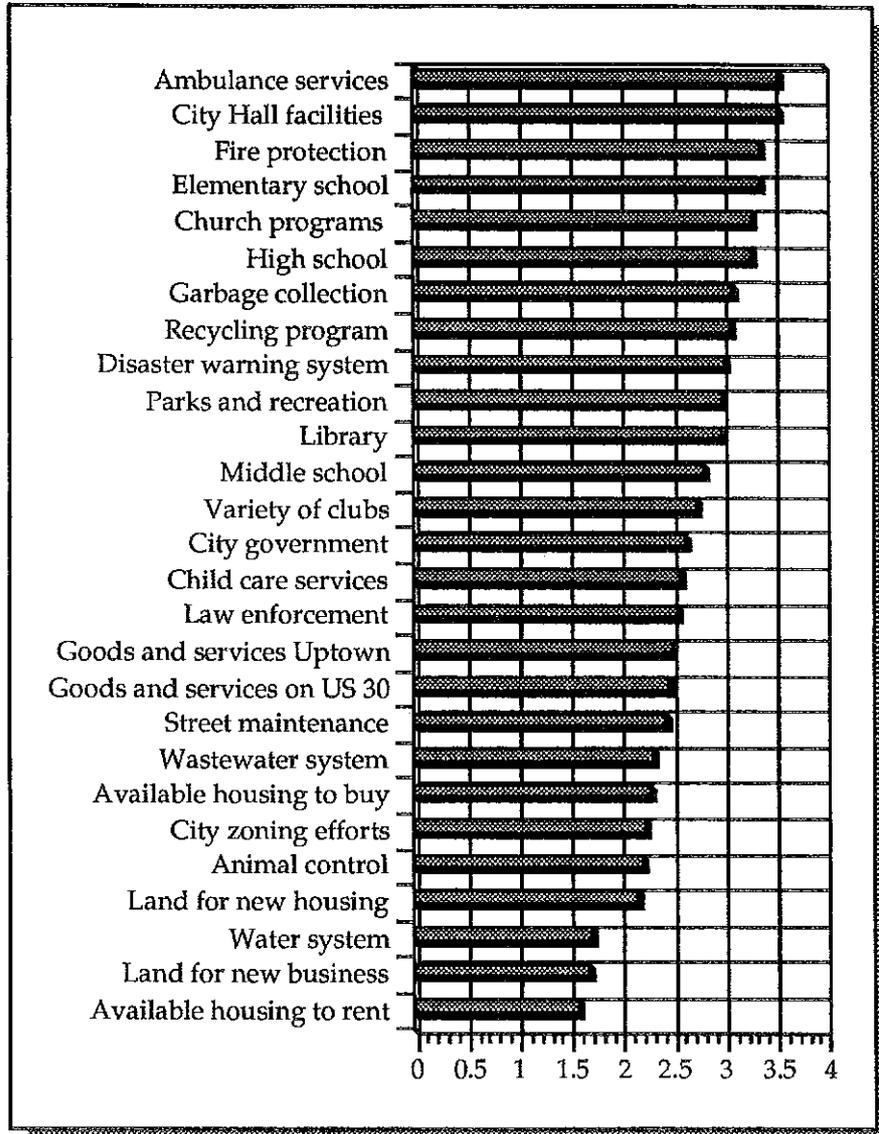
- *Transportation and Infrastructure*, including improving and strengthening working relationships between the city and

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Participants in the Planning and Zoning Community Survey rated important community services and facilities, which are rated at right using a one-to-four scale.

Services with an aggregate score of 3.0 or above are viewed favorably; those with scores below 2.5 represent areas for additional attention.

Generally, Mount Vernon earned high marks for satisfaction with ambulance and fire services, schools and church programs, and solid waste recycling and collection. Residents were less satisfied with the availability of rental housing, land for business expansion and new housing, and municipal efforts to control animals and manage zoning issues.



the Iowa Department of Transportation, developing a strong connection between the town and the regional highway system, developing a linked pedestrian network, providing adequate capacity for wastewater treatment, and ensuring public facilities can accommodate the effects of controlled growth.

■ The Planning and Zoning Community Survey

In 1993, the Planning and Zoning Commission polled

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Included among the questions asked of participants in the Planning and Zoning Community Survey was this question:

"If you were attempting to convince a friend to move to Mount Vernon, which community characteristics would you stress, merely mention, or not mention at all?"

More than 650 persons responded, and were most likely to promote characteristics related to:

- appearance of town
- accessibility to colleges and universities
- local schools
- accessibility to cultural events
- the rural setting of the surrounding countryside.

Residents would be least likely to discuss:

- restaurants
- availability of employment or rental housing
- quality of rental or owner-occupied housing.

residents to determine local attitudes regarding the community, services, facilities, and other quality of life issues. The survey asked participants to assess their satisfaction with the community and its features, and asked residents to suggest community improvements and activities that could be undertaken to meet local needs. More than 720 households completed surveys, and results were reported at a public meeting held in March, 1993.

The survey response was outstanding, representing about 80% of Mount Vernon's households. Residents who returned surveys represented an even proportion of males and females. Slightly more than 46% of respondents were ages 30-49, with another 44.8% aged 50 and above. About 10% of those responding were between the ages of 18 and 29. More than 40% of respondents have lived in Mount Vernon more than 20 years.

• *Evaluation of Community Services and Facilities*

Participants in the survey were asked to rate existing community services and facilities. The rating of community services and facilities reveals a high level of satisfaction with the city's emergency preparedness, both for personal illness and community disaster. The City Hall, high school and elementary school, all newer buildings, received high marks as well. Programs of the various community churches, community recycling efforts, and solid waste collection also were highly rated. This survey was conducted during a period of rehabilitation of the wells that comprise the city's water supply. The construction phasing and flushing that was a necessary phase of the process altered the taste and appearance of local tap water for a short period of time. This service disruption explains the low ranking for the water supply. The City of Mount Vernon has completed the construction and rebalanced the cosmetic and taste properties of the water since this survey was completed.

• *Attitudes Regarding Possible Futures for Mount Vernon*

To evaluate alternative futures of the city, respondents were asked to react to a series of hypothetical newspaper headlines in the year 2002. Residents were asked to evaluate

COMMUNITY SURVEY

whether they were "happy to see", "sorry to see" or had "no opinion" of the headline. Residents would be happiest to see headlines that announced that the City of Mount Vernon:

- Gains a daily stop for Amtrak passenger rail service (77.3%)
- Merges more community services with Lisbon (75.5%)
- Receives state recognition for its historic districts (75.2%)
- Has a banner year in tourism (68.3%)
- Exhibits gradual population growth (67.8)
- Installs sidewalks along all city streets (58.4%)
- Completes a community-wide nature trail (54.9%)
- Becomes a major antique center (54.8%)

On the other hand, residents would be sorry to see headlines that announced that the City of Mount Vernon:

- Exhibits rapid population growth (64.3%)
- Witnessed the completion of the US 30 bypass (50.2%)
- Passes a bond issue to serve an industrial park (31.4%)

Residents were also asked to respond to a series of statements regarding possible improvements and expansions of local facilities. The questionnaire asked residents to evaluate each proposed improvement on a continuum from no support, to support without city funding, to support with city funding. Respondents were encouraged to suggest new projects. The survey revealed the following attitudes:

Considerable support exists to use city funds to:

- Install sidewalks along city streets (47.7%)
- Expand the community swimming pool (38.0%)
- Acquire additional park land (36.9%)

Considerable support exists to accomplish the following improvements, but in a manner that does not use city funds:

- Develop land for residential use (59.8%)
- Build more affordable housing (44.0%)
- Develop land for Highway 30 commercial use (43.7%)
- Build more affordable rental units (43.4%)
- Develop land for industrial use (30.4%)

The survey suggested a project to establish a recreation nature path between Cedar Rapids and Mount Vernon. This

BUSINESS SURVEY

project drew the most sharply divided response, with 33.9% of respondents indicating that they do not support the project at all, while 31.7% not only support the idea, but would support use of city funding to complete the project.

Responses from the survey identified attitudes and issues of importance to residents which served as a basis for setting goals for the comprehensive planning effort.

■ The Mount Vernon Business Survey

In order to include the business community in the process of updating the Mount Vernon Comprehensive Plan, the Planning and Zoning Commission conducted a survey of business owners in the city. The survey gathered information on the number and types of employment opportunities available in Mount Vernon. In addition, the survey instrument was designed to gather information regarding city services and regulations that affect local business. The survey was returned by 99 business owners. The largest proportion of respondents were engaged in service businesses (60%) and retail establishments (37%). Almost 60% of owners reside in Mount Vernon. About 11% of businesses that responded to the survey have been located in Mount Vernon for more than 50 years, while about 25% have been in the city less than 5 years.

Community-wide data from the survey indicated that:

- More than 90% of business owners had a highly favorable impression of municipal services, with fire protection, law enforcement, solid waste collection receiving the highest ratings.
- An overwhelming majority of business owners (80%) believed that city services relating to water supply and distribution, wastewater collection and treatment and street maintenance were adequate.
- Slightly more than one-half of business respondents (50.5%) reported a favorable impression of the city's zoning efforts.
- Business owners are divided on the issue of whether the city should impose exterior renovation controls. About 38%

BUSINESS SURVEY

avored such efforts, 27% were opposed and 21% expressed no opinion.

Business survey participants identified the following important community employment characteristics:

- Respondents report low rates of employee turnover, with 82% of businesses experiencing a turnover of less than 25% per year.
- About 30 of the 99 businesses experience problems finding employees for their operations.

Businesses were asked to compare past hiring (in the last 5 years) against projected hiring trends (future five years). Five years ago, about half of responding businesses had fewer than 5 employees. In the next five years, the proportion of such businesses anticipating to have fewer than 5 employees increases to 70%. The proportion of businesses with between 5 and 9 employees is expected to drop from 11% (five years ago) to 6% in the next five years. In general, smaller firms expected to have slightly fewer employees, and larger firms (more than 20 employees) expected to have slightly more employees. In general, business owners responding to the survey expected to meet staffing needs and seasonal increases in workload by increasing the hours of existing employees. As a whole, employment levels can be expected to remain stable or to be reduced slightly through more intense staff management or attrition.

• *Role of Survey Data in Developing the Plan*

The findings of these Planning and Zoning Commission surveys were an important input to the community assessment and visioning process. The community and business survey findings reinforced the identification of the three specific issue areas, including:

- Urban Design
- Growth and Development Management
- Infrastructure and Transportation

The Comprehensive Plan Coordinating Committee developed specific priorities, goals, and actions for each of these

THE PLAN: APPROACH AND FORMAT

broad issue areas. This assessment and strategic planning effort provided the foundation for this detailed comprehensive plan document.

■ The Comprehensive Plan: Approach and Format

The comprehensive plan presents a strategy-oriented approach to the future development of Mount Vernon. The plan includes seven chapters, corresponding to the town's most important physical development issues. Many of the traditional sections of a comprehensive plan, such as land use, housing, infrastructure, and transportation, are organized as recurring components to these inter-disciplinary chapters. This enables the plan to tell the story of the city's future development and presents an integrated program for the city's growth.

• *Themes Within the Mount Vernon Plan*

The overriding theme of the Mount Vernon Plan, based on the results of the Community and Business Survey, involves accommodating and encouraging new growth and investment while maintaining the town's traditional and distinctive urban character.

- 1. A Portrait of Mount Vernon**, presenting an analytical view of Mount Vernon's people, economy, and position within its region.
- 2. A Timeless City**, examining the patterns and relationships that make Mount Vernon special and considering challenges to its distinctive sense of place. The chapter creates a "Development Constitution" for Mount Vernon. The Constitution establishes the general principles and ideas that guide the more detailed elements of the plan.
- 3. Growth and Land Use**, examining development demands and projecting the amount of residential, commercial and industrial land needed for the next twenty years. It presents an inventory of existing land use patterns, with a detailed strategy for future growth in new development areas. Also provided is an inventory of housing conditions, an analysis

THE PLAN: APPROACH AND FORMAT

of housing costs relative to comparable towns, and a housing affordability analysis. Important issues include rehabilitating and preserving the city's older and historic housing stock, and providing additional rental and affordable housing opportunities.

4. Traditional Town in a New Century, presenting a Community Design Concept for Mount Vernon and describing the projects and design principles necessary to realize the concept.

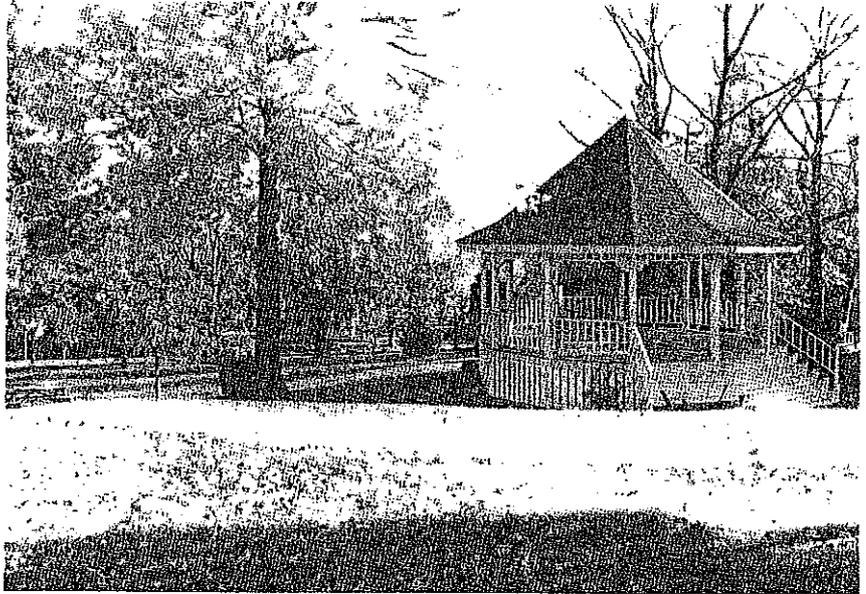
5. Uptown Mount Vernon, providing an innovative development program for the city's vital and historic town center, designed to improve the district's already attractive environment, create opportunities for additional business, and improve the functioning of the district and its friendliness to users.

6. Quality Public Services, examining the quality of Mount Vernon's street and sidewalk system, public facilities, infrastructure, and parks. It includes a detailed assessment of each public facility and provides a specific program for infrastructure and facility development.

7. Implementing the Plan, drawing together the analysis and policies of the plan into a program for implementation. It summarizes the development policies, financial characteristics, and fiscal constraints of the City of Mount Vernon as it looks toward the next twenty years. This section presents an Implementation Schedule, listing proposed policies and projects and the time-frame for their completion.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAN

Memorial Park Gazebo. This park, along the route of the original Lincoln Highway and adjacent to the town center, symbolizes the special quality of this unique community.



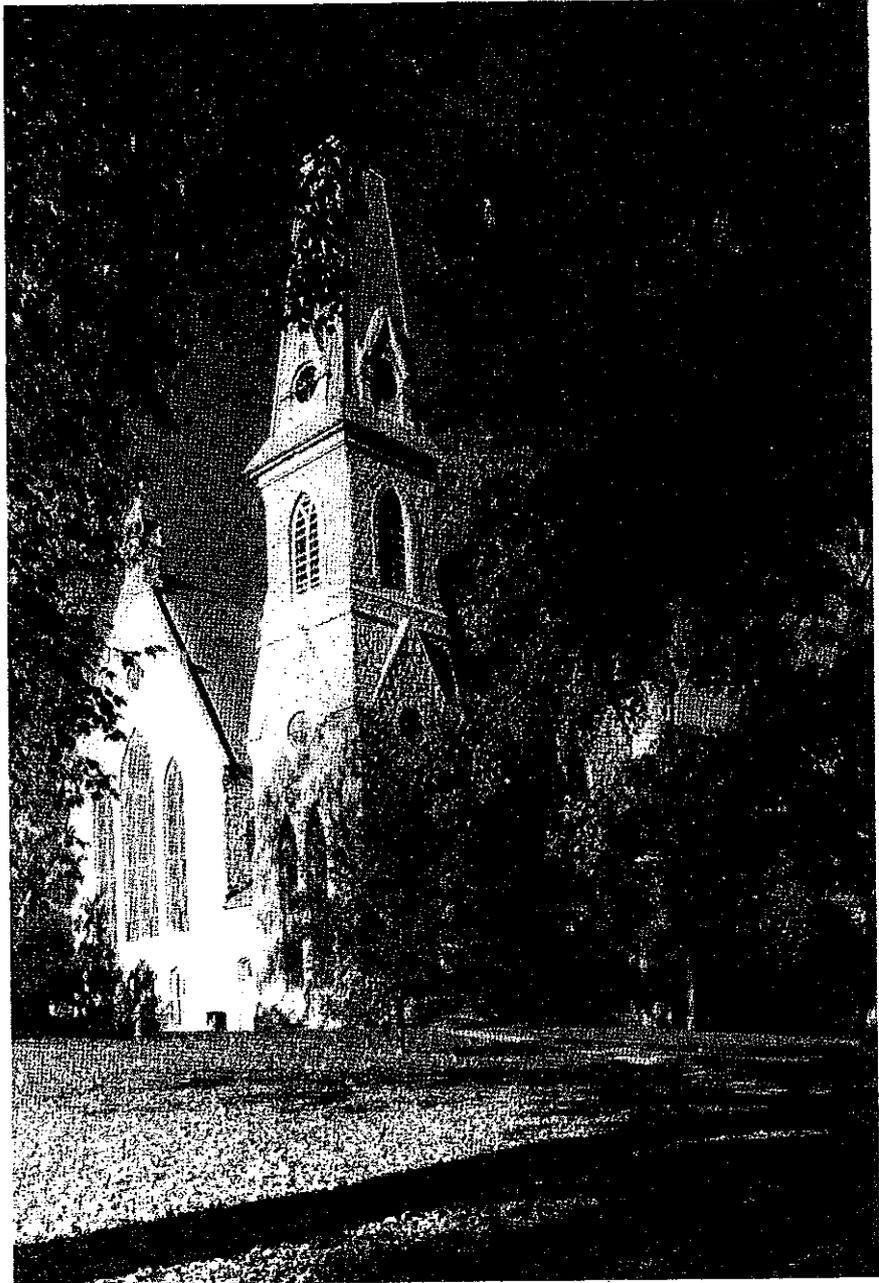
The dimensions, landscaping, and architecture of Mount Vernon's historic residential districts define the physical character of the community. Mount Vernon's residents consider this character to be one of the town's greatest assets.



A PROFILE OF MOUNT VERNON

1

Cornell College. The quality of life in Mount Vernon is founded in the reinforcing nature of its educational resources and its active and well-informed citizenry. The city's superior built environment helps secure its reputation as one of the most beautiful communities in the region.



A PROFILE OF MOUNT VERNON

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter examines important demographic, metropolitan, and regional trends that will have a major impact on Mount Vernon as it plans for its future. This analysis will examine the community's population and demographic dynamics, including an examination of the city's future population composition. In addition, it will analyze important regional issues that will affect the quality of the city's environment.

Population History and Characteristics

Population and population characteristics help to explain the condition of a community. This discussion will present important changes in the characteristics and dynamics of Mount Vernon's population.

- *Mount Vernon's population grew rapidly between 1880 and 1900, but was stable from 1900 through the 1930s.*

Mount Vernon, like other communities surrounding Cedar Rapids and Iowa City, began life as an independent rural village. Soon after its founding, the City was linked to the metropolitan city and other regional communities by railroad and interurban lines. Mount Vernon's population stabilized at about 1500 people from 1900 through the Depression of the 1930s. Overall population growth between 1870 and 1940 raised the City's population from 910 to 1489, an increase of 63% over a 70-year period.

- *Mount Vernon's greatest growth in the modern era occurred during the 1940s, as it had the highest growth rate of any Cedar Rapids metropolitan community. The City added more people during this decade than in the period after 1950. Since 1950, the city's population has increased 150%.*

POPULATION HISTORY

Mount Vernon's population increased from 1,411 in 1930 to 2,320 in 1950, an increase of 64.44%. In the metropolitan area, only Iowa City and its surrounding communities experienced a higher rate of growth. During the same period, Linn County as a whole grew by 26.64% and Cedar Rapids grew by about 29%.

During the war years of the 1940s, Mount Vernon's population grew by 831 persons to 2,320, an increase of more than 56%. This was the largest increase in the Mount Vernon's modern history. This growth was partially caused by the expansion of Cornell College during the period, and an influx of returning servicemen and women. During the three post-war decades, Mount Vernon's population increased in the range of 270 and 425 persons per year over ten years, achieving a level of 3,325 by 1980. During the 1980s, the rate of growth increased only slightly, exhibiting a respectable 10% growth rate.

Table 1-1 exhibits historic population growth in Mount Vernon, compared to other regional communities. The town's

TABLE 1-1: Population Change for Mount Vernon and Other Metropolitan Communities, 1930-1990.

| | 1930 | 1940 | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | % Change 1930-50 | % Change 1950-70 | % Change 1970-90 |
|---------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Mount Vernon | 1,411 | 1,489 | 2,320 | 2,593 | 3,018 | 3,325 | 3,657 | 64.44 | 30.09 | 21.17 |
| Lisbon | 795 | 873 | 952 | 1,227 | 1,329 | 1,458 | 1,452 | 19.75 | 39.60 | 9.26 |
| Linn County | 82,336 | 89,142 | 104,274 | 136,899 | 163,213 | 169,775 | 168,796 | 26.64 | 56.52 | 3.42 |
| Cedar Rapids | 56,097 | 62,120 | 72,296 | 92,035 | 110,642 | 110,243 | 108,780 | 28.89 | 53.04 | -1.69 |
| Marion | 4,348 | 4,721 | 5,916 | 18,882 | 18,028 | 19,474 | 20,374 | 36.06 | 204.73 | 13.01 |
| Springville | 598 | 608 | 680 | 785 | 970 | 1,165 | 1,068 | 13.7 | 42.65 | 10.10 |
| Hiawatha | -- | -- | -- | 1,336 | 2,416 | 4,885 | 4,986 | -- | -- | 106.37 |
| Robins | 190 | 205 | 272 | 426 | 663 | 726 | 875 | 43.16 | 143.75 | 31.98 |
| Iowa City | 15,340 | 17,182 | 27,212 | 33,443 | 46,850 | 50,508 | 59,735 | 77.39 | 72.17 | 27.50 |
| Coralville | 254 | 433 | 977 | 2,357 | 6,130 | 7,687 | 10,347 | 284.64 | 527.43 | 68.79 |
| North Liberty | 161 | 282 | 309 | 334 | 1,055 | 2,046 | 2,926 | 91.93 | 241.42 | 177.34 |
| West Branch | 652 | 719 | 769 | 1,053 | 1,322 | 1,867 | 1,908 | 17.94 | 71.91 | 44.33 |

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1990.

REGIONAL POPULATION TRENDS

population trends have mirrored those of other parts of the Cedar Rapids/Iowa City region. Generally, suburban and nearby rural communities have grown at a faster rate than Cedar Rapids, and have accounted for an increasing share of the county's population. Rural towns on the periphery of the metropolitan areas have experienced somewhat more rapid absolute growth. Overall, Linn County's population more than doubled (an increase of 105%) between 1930 and 1990. In 1930, Mount Vernon accounted for 1.71% of Linn County's population. By 1990, that percentage had grown to 2.17%.

- *Metropolitan population growth has been increasingly directed toward smaller cities near Cedar Rapids and Iowa City.*

This comparison reveals rapid growth in Marion and Coralville, inner-ring cities adjacent to the respective metropolitan employment centers of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. Rapid growth also occurred in outlying independent towns located along major transportation routes such as US 6, US 30, State Highway 151 and Interstate 380. These communities have been receiving an increasing proportion of county population growth. This suggests a pattern of metropolitan growth that will favor Mount Vernon and surrounding communities.

Cedar Rapids has had a declining share of Linn County's population between 1970 and 1992, which has only recently reversed with annexations and new development adjacent to the city. The Census Bureau has published a revised estimate of Cedar Rapids' 1992 population at 111,688, an increase of 3000 persons since 1990, or 2.67%.

- *Since 1970, the highest proportional population growth has occurred in the Iowa City metropolitan communities of North Liberty, Coralville, and West Branch; and the Cedar Rapids metropolitan communities of Robins, Hiawatha, and Mount Vernon .*

Mount Vernon has experienced a growth rate of 21.7% over the two decades between 1970 and 1990, a higher rate than all comparable cities except the above mentioned small cities. Marion, Springville, and Lisbon had growth rates over the twenty-year period of about 10%, or one-half the level of Mount Vernon .

POPULATION CHANGE AND MIGRATION

Population change is explained by two factors:

- *A comparison of births and deaths.* If more people are born in a community than die, the population of that community will tend to increase. Generally, a city with more population in younger age groups (particularly with people in child-bearing or family formation years) will experience a higher overall birth rate.
- *Migration Patterns.* Some of a community's residents choose to move out of that community; other people move into it. If more people come to the city than leave, its population will tend to increase. A community that is building new housing will experience significant in-migration, some of which are residents new to the metropolitan area, while others are relocating from other Cedar Rapids or Iowa City area communities.

Annexation is a negligible contributor to population growth in Mount Vernon, as urban subdivisions are built in areas that have been previously annexed into the city. In order to assess the dynamics of Mount Vernon's population during the 1980s, the city's expected population based solely on natural population change is calculated and compared with the actual outcome of the 1990 census. To ensure that the analysis is not inflated by the presence of Cornell College students, the student population has been removed from the base calculation, but added to the final total population projection.

These projections are based on the following assumptions:

- The use of a cohort-survival method to develop projections. This method "ages" a five-year age range of people by computing how many of them will survive into the next five year period. Cohort survival rates used here were developed by the National Center for Health Statistics (1992).
- Enrollment data provided by the Cornell College Office of Institutional Development adjusted as follows: 1980 enrollment of 898 students assigned at 55% male and 45% female; freshmen and one-half sophomores assigned to the 15-19 age cohort; one-half of sophomores, juniors and seniors assigned

POPULATION CHANGE AND MIGRATION

TABLE 1-2: Predicted and Actual Population Change 1980-1990

| | 1980 | 1990 | Change | % |
|---|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Predicted Population (based on survival and birth rates) | 3,325 | 3,682 | 357 | 10.74 |
| Actual Population | 3,325 | 3,657 | 332 | 9.98 |
| Predicted Male Population | 1,619 | 1,696 | 77 | 4.76 |
| Actual Male Population | 1,619 | 1,749 | 130 | 8.03 |
| Predicted Female Population | 1,706 | 1,986 | 280 | 16.41 |
| Actual Female Population | 1,706 | 1,908 | 202 | 11.84 |

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*.
RDG Martin Shukert, 1994.

to the 20-24 age cohort; 1990 enrollment of 1147 students assigned at 45% male and 55% female.

- Projected birth rates for the population developed by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table 1-2 summarizes the results of this analysis. Natural population growth (based on the composition of Mount Vernon's 1980 population) predicted a 1990 population of 3,682, an increase of 357 people or 10.74%. The city's 1990 population of 3,657 indicates that net migration was close to zero. Both male populations and female populations were expected to grow from 1980 levels through natural change and immigration, and this is validated by census figures. Female population would have been predicted to increase the most, and they fulfilled this expectation, although to a lesser degree than expected. Male population, on the other hand, increased at twice the predicted rate. The City's overall experience is in contrast to the enrollment of Cornell College, which displayed an increase in the proportion of female students.

• *Young families with children accounted for additions to Mount Vernon's population during the 1980s. However, the city was less successful in retaining more mature households.*

POPULATION CHANGE AND MIGRATION

A more in-depth analysis examines the age groups that accounted for the largest share of the city's population change during the 1980s. This helps to predict what the city's population may look like if current trends continue into the future. In addition, it helps determine the types of services and investments that will be most important for the city during this current planning period.

Table 1-3 compares predicted and actual population change for each age group in the city. The predicted population projects how many people should be in each age group in 1990 if the city had experienced neither migration nor population increases caused by annexation. The variance percentage shows how well this prediction agrees with actual popula-

**TABLE 1-3: Predicted and Actual Age Cohort Changes
All Residents, 1980-1990**

| Age Group | 1980 actual | 1990 pred. | 1990 actual | (Actual) - (Pred) | % variance: actual/pred. |
|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Under 5 | 193 | 169 | 220 | 51 | 30.17 |
| 5-9 | 197 | 167 | 220 | 53 | 31.71 |
| 10-14 | 205 | 192 | 238 | 46 | 23.83 |
| 15-19 | 609 | 706 | 629 | -77 | -39.52 |
| 20-24 | 597 | 841 | 693 | -148 | -72.53 |
| 25-29 | 158 | 181 | 161 | -20 | -11.24 |
| 30-34 | 255 | 124 | 220 | 96 | 77.77 |
| 35-39 | 188 | 156 | 237 | 81 | 51.86 |
| 40-44 | 154 | 251 | 235 | -16 | -6.32 |
| 45-49 | 135 | 184 | 168 | -16 | -8.71 |
| 50-54 | 110 | 149 | 129 | -20 | -13.41 |
| 55-59 | 114 | 128 | 87 | -41 | -31.90 |
| 60-64 | 77 | 101 | 84 | -17 | -17.03 |
| 65-69 | 66 | 99 | 98 | -1 | -1.40 |
| 70-74 | 81 | 63 | 59 | -4 | -5.70 |
| 75-79 | 69 | 49 | 67 | 18 | 36.04 |
| Over 80 | 117 | 120 | 112 | -8 | -7.04 |
| Total | 3,325 | 3,682 | 3,657 | -25 | -0.68 |

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*.
RDG Martin Shukert, 1994.

POPULATION CHANGE AND MIGRATION

tion change -- whether people in a given age group tended to move into or out of Mount Vernon.

The analysis shows that Mount Vernon's 1990 population displayed the greatest in-migration of young households with members between ages 30 and 40. The actual population exceeds projected population by 78% and 52% respectively for these cohorts. The high positive variance of children below age 9 echoes the attraction for relatively young families. On the other hand, migration was either small or negative for age groups between 40 and 65. This suggests that Mount Vernon may have lacked move-up houses or other appropriate settings for middle-aged and older adults. Recent housing development in new subdivisions on the periphery of the city, and on rural estate acreages may be providing these residential alternatives, leading to a greater ability to retain mature households.

The senior population in Mount Vernon displayed stability or decline within the community. Most age cohorts over age 60 displayed negative migration patterns, suggesting that many elderly persons leave Mount Vernon in their older years. The exception is the age cohort of 75-79 years, which increased slightly, and may be explained by the presence of affordable housing for seniors at the Chapel View Apartments.

These findings suggest that Mount Vernon has successfully attracted young adults and their young families, but has been less successful at retaining residents in middle-aged or senior cohorts. This may be related to a lack of housing settings which meet the needs of older people. The city's housing stock is nearly fully-occupied, given the findings of the 1990 Census and the 1994 Housing Condition Survey completed for this plan.

• Mount Vernon's population has not aged significantly during the last ten years. Young children have increased as a percentage of the city's population as an "echo" of the growing number of young adults aged 30-40.

The median age of Mount Vernon's population has increased only slightly during the 1980s, increasing from 22.9 in 1980

POPULATION CHANGE AND MIGRATION

to 23.0 in 1990. Within this distribution, young children under age 15 made up the fastest growing share of total population, accounting for 18.54% of all residents compared to 17.8% in 1980. Mount Vernon's population over age 60 declined as a percent of total population, from about 12.33% in 1980 to 11.48% in 1990.

TABLE 1-4: Age Composition as Percent of Total Population, 1980-1990

| Age Group | 1980 Pop | 1990 Pop | Change 1980-90 | % of Total 1980 | % of Total 1990 |
|------------|----------|----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Under 5 | 193 | 220 | 27 | 5.80 | 6.02 |
| 5-9 | 197 | 220 | 23 | 5.92 | 6.02 |
| 10-14 | 205 | 238 | 33 | 6.17 | 6.51 |
| 15-19 | 609 | 629 | 20 | 18.3 | 17.20 |
| 20-24 | 597 | 693 | 96 | 17.95 | 18.95 |
| 25-29 | 158 | 161 | 3 | 4.75 | 4.40 |
| 30-34 | 255 | 220 | -35 | 7.67 | 6.02 |
| 35-39 | 188 | 237 | 49 | 5.65 | 6.48 |
| 40-44 | 154 | 235 | 81 | 4.63 | 2.21 |
| 45-49 | 135 | 168 | 33 | 4.06 | 4.59 |
| 50-54 | 110 | 129 | 19 | 3.31 | 3.53 |
| 55-59 | 114 | 87 | -27 | 3.43 | 2.38 |
| 60-64 | 77 | 84 | 7 | 2.32 | 2.30 |
| 65-69 | 66 | 98 | 32 | 1.98 | 2.70 |
| 70-74 | 81 | 59 | -22 | 2.44 | 1.61 |
| 75-79 | 69 | 67 | -2 | 2.08 | 1.83 |
| Over 80 | 117 | 112 | -5 | 3.52 | 3.06 |
| Median Age | 22.9 | 23.0 | | | |

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census.
RDG Martin Shukert, 1994.

POPULATION CHANGE AND MIGRATION

These changes in age distribution indicate that:

- Mount Vernon continues to be a relatively young community, and an attractive living environment for families with young children.
- College-aged persons (ages 20-24) now represent nearly one out of every five persons in Mount Vernon .
- Mount Vernon has been less able to attract young adults, aged 25-35, whose proportion of the local population has declined from 12.42% to 10.42% over the past decade.
- Mature adults aged 35-39, and 45-55 represent an increasing proportion of the local population.
- Senior citizens make up a decreasing proportion of the city's population.
- *The size of Mount Vernon's households has remained relatively steady during the last ten years.*

During the last census period, Mount Vernon has generally countered the trend toward smaller households in most American communities. This further substantiates the influence of families with children in the growth of the town. The city's average household size was 2.65 in 1980 and 2.64 in 1990. During this decade, the number of households in the city increased by 57 or 6.06% of its 1980 total. Population during this same period increased by 9.98%. While the existing city will experience a slow decline in people per households as a result of children growing up and moving away, the high degree of new family-oriented development in the area will assure that household size remains relatively constant.

Population Projections

Projecting the future size and makeup of Mount Vernon's population helps predict the future demographic character of the town and aids in planning for future investments and policies. Forecasting future population for Mount Vernon is complicated by the town's presence in a growing metropoli-

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

tan area and by its large student population. Future population for Mount Vernon is forecast by:

- Computing probable changes in Mount Vernon's existing population. The calculation of the "base" population of the city assumes no net migration.
- Controlling for student population by excising the enrollment figures from the base data used for the projections, computing the projection, and then adding the student population onto the future projection total.
- Basing population forecasts on 1990 Census statistics for age distribution. As before, the cohort survival method is used to project population, utilizing birth and death rates developed by the Bureau of the Census and the National Center for Health Statistics.
- Five migration models have been utilized, designed to be relevant to the city's likely potential for growth. These correspond to migration rates of 0%, +4.0%, +6.0%, +10.0% and +20.0%. The net migration rate experienced by the city between 1980 and 1990 was approximately +10.0%. Migration rates in Mount Vernon are partially limited by the availability of housing in the city. Thus, people who might otherwise move to the city cannot because of a lack of housing opportunities.

TABLE 1-5: Mount Vernon Population Projections, 1995-2010 Low Birth Scenario

| | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | Change 1995-2010 |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|
| No net migration | 3,662 | 3,657 | 3,672 | 3,709 | 47 |
| +4.0% migration | 3,712 | 3,758 | 3,758 | 3,920 | 208 |
| +6.0% migration | 3,737 | 3,810 | 3,906 | 4,030 | 293 |
| +10.0% migration | 3,787 | 3,814 | 4,070 | 4,261 | 474 |
| +20.0% migration | 3,913 | 4,184 | 4,508 | 4,898 | 985 |

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*.
RDG Martin Shukert, 1994.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

• *Summary*

Mount Vernon has grown significantly since 1930, initially in response to the expansion of the college, and later the result of natural increases that accompanied that population. In recent years, Mount Vernon's growth has been guided by metropolitan influences, as population growth in Linn County has shifted to areas outside the principal city of Cedar Rapids. Communities near Cedar Rapids were the first to grow with new residents during the two decades immediately following World War II. In the past decade, new large-lot housing has extended into unincorporated parts of Linn County, and brought new residents near towns such as Mount Vernon. These new rural residents represent a growing part of local school enrollment.

During this period of growth, Mount Vernon has increasingly become a home to commuting families with children. This is reflected by rapid growth among younger and middle-aged adults aged 35-39 and their younger children, and among older adults aged 45-55. College-aged residents (ages 20-24) now represent nearly one out of every five persons in Mount Vernon. However, the senior population has been declining over the past decade.

Mount Vernon finds it difficult to accommodate population growth with its limited housing supply, especially among seniors and young persons who may not be able or desire to own and maintain a single-family home. Population growth is restricted by a lack of housing sites, especially within in-town settings consistent with the form and context of the traditional city.

During the next twenty years, natural population growth, continued recent development rates and metropolitan population influences could produce a population of over 5,000 persons. Mount Vernon has an unusual opportunity to define the nature of its future as it faces a potential for significant new growth. This planning effort will enable Mount Vernon to manage development, reinforce the city's existing character, and accommodate new residents as a resource for the future of the community.

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

Employment

Mount Vernon's economic life is based on local employment opportunities at Cornell College, and regional job growth in Cedar Rapids, Linn County, and Iowa City. While Mount Vernon includes some agricultural, commercial and industrial development, they do not employ large proportions of the local population. Local industries do not employ large numbers of full-time personnel. As a result, most residents of the residential community work outside the city's boundaries, generally in other parts of metropolitan Cedar Rapids. This section examines various economic characteristics and dynamics of Mount Vernon's population, in order to establish a basis for economic planning.

- *Mount Vernon's residents are more likely to be employed in education than other residents of the metro area.*

**TABLE 1-6: Employment by Industry
Mount Vernon and Linn County, 1990**

| Industry | Mount Vernon | | Linn County | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | Employed | % | Employed | % |
| Total Employed | 1,787 | 100.00 | 87,606 | 100.00 |
| Agriculture, mining | 47 | 2.63 | 2,052 | 2.34 |
| Construction | 92 | 5.15 | 4,194 | 4.79 |
| Manufacturing | 203 | 11.36 | 20,777 | 23.72 |
| Transportation | 73 | 4.09 | 3,418 | 3.90 |
| Communications and Utilities | 23 | 1.29 | 3,495 | 3.99 |
| Wholesale Trade | 36 | 2.01 | 4,006 | 4.57 |
| Retail Trade | 293 | 16.40 | 15,557 | 17.76 |
| Finance, insurance, real estate | 110 | 6.16 | 5,665 | 6.47 |
| Nonprofessional Services | 124 | 6.94 | 7,407 | 8.45 |
| Health Services | 85 | 4.76 | 6,183 | 7.06 |
| Education | 558 | 31.23 | 6,856 | 7.83 |
| Professional | 110 | 6.16 | 5,764 | 6.58 |
| Public Administration | 33 | 1.85 | 2,232 | 2.55 |

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1-6 compares the employment makeup of Mount Vernon's residents with those of Linn County for 1990. The information indicates that Mount Vernon's residents are about as likely to be employed in the FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) and professional service sectors as other metro area workers. About 12.32% of the city's 1990 work force is employed in these areas, in contrast to about 13.05% of the Linn County work force. Mount Vernon has much less employment in manufacturing, and in specialized professions such as health services. Mount Vernon has a smaller proportion of its employment in non-professional services, such as business and repair services, personal services, entertainment and recreation.

- *Mount Vernon's residents in 1990 are more likely to be employed in professional and managerial jobs than other residents of Linn County.*

Table 1-7 compares the types of jobs held by Mount Vernon's residents in 1990 to Linn County. In general, the local occupational profile differs from that of the overall metropolitan area. About 33% of Mount Vernon's work force is employed in executive, managerial, or professional areas, in contrast to 27% for the metropolitan area. About 16% of Mount Vernon's workers are in production or labor jobs, compared with about 25% for Linn County. Mount Vernon residents are more likely to be employed in service and retail occupations and less likely to hold sales and technician employment than Linn County.

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS • INCOME

**TABLE 1-7: Employment by Occupational Category:
Mount Vernon and Linn County, 1990**

| Industry | Mount Vernon | | Linn County | |
|---|--------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | Employed | % | Employed | % |
| Employment | 1,787 | 100.00 | 87,606 | 100.00 |
| Managerial and professional occupations | 584 | 32.68 | 23,474 | 26.79 |
| Technical and sales | 566 | 31.73 | 29,347 | 33.50 |
| Service occupations | 318 | 17.79 | 11,388 | 13.00 |
| Farming, forestry and fishing occupations | 38 | 2.13 | 1,556 | 1.77 |
| Precision production, craft and repair | 103 | 5.76 | 9,433 | 10.77 |
| Operators, fabricators, and laborers | 178 | 9.96 | 12,408 | 14.16 |

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

• *Mount Vernon exhibits a 1990 average income well above that of more diverse metropolitan cities and the state at large.*

Table 1-8 displays 1990 income distributions for Mount Vernon, Linn County, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City and the State of Iowa. In 1990, Mount Vernon's median household income was \$35,057, the highest among comparable communities, and far exceeding that of the State of Iowa. This demonstrates the more homogeneous, "white collar" income character of the city, and the opportunities provided by access to metropolitan employment.

Mount Vernon's college-based employment boosts its median income, relative to the more diversified, industry-based and technical service economies of Cedar Rapids and Linn County. This is most evident in the \$35,000 to \$50,000 category, which includes more than 25% of Mount Vernon residents and nearly 22% of Linn County residents. However, Mount Vernon has a smaller proportion of those earning

INCOME • COMMUTING PATTERNS

very high incomes, with about 5% of local households earning over \$50,000 annually.

About 8% of Mount Vernon's households reported 1989 incomes below \$15,000, compared with 12% for Linn County, 13% for Cedar Rapids, 20% for Iowa City, and 26.7% for Iowa. Iowa City's incomes must be qualified by the presence of a comparably large number of undergraduate and graduate students. Mount Vernon lacks good employment and housing opportunities for low-skill, low-income persons, although the continuing expansion of the mobile home park suggests a real demand for low/moderate income housing.

Most of Mount Vernon's residents enjoy a relatively high degree of individual financial security either through college-based employment, or through access to high paying jobs in the metropolitan job centers of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City.

Mount Vernon's income distribution and employment characteristics suggest that future residential and economic development efforts should concentrate on reinforcing and accommodating professional and managerial sectors of the economy. Mount Vernon's location and demographic characteristics give it a potential to attract industries that can join college/university research and technology-based enterprises. This would be reinforced by the preponderance of academic, communications technologies and engineering support occupations available in Iowa City and Cedar Rapids.

TABLE 1-8: Income Distribution for Households by Percentage, 1989

| | Under \$10,000 | 10,000-14,999 | 15,000-24,999 | 25,000-34,999 | 35,000-49,999 | 50,000-74,999 | Over \$75,000 | Median |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| Mount Vernon | 7.68 | 7.68 | 20.63 | 13.85 | 25.28 | 19.82 | 5.06 | \$35,057 |
| Linn County | 12.18 | 8.01 | 17.25 | 17.58 | 21.97 | 16.41 | 6.61 | \$32,137 |
| Cedar Rapids | 13.44 | 8.26 | 17.10 | 17.58 | 21.47 | 15.37 | 6.78 | \$31,458 |
| Iowa City | 20.43 | 11.62 | 18.63 | 13.81 | 13.44 | 13.18 | 8.89 | \$24,565 |
| | 16.25 | 10.47 | 20.77 | 18.31 | 18.01 | 11.39 | 4.80 | \$26,229 |

Source: 1990 Census.

ECONOMIC FACTORS: CONCLUSIONS

Commuting Patterns

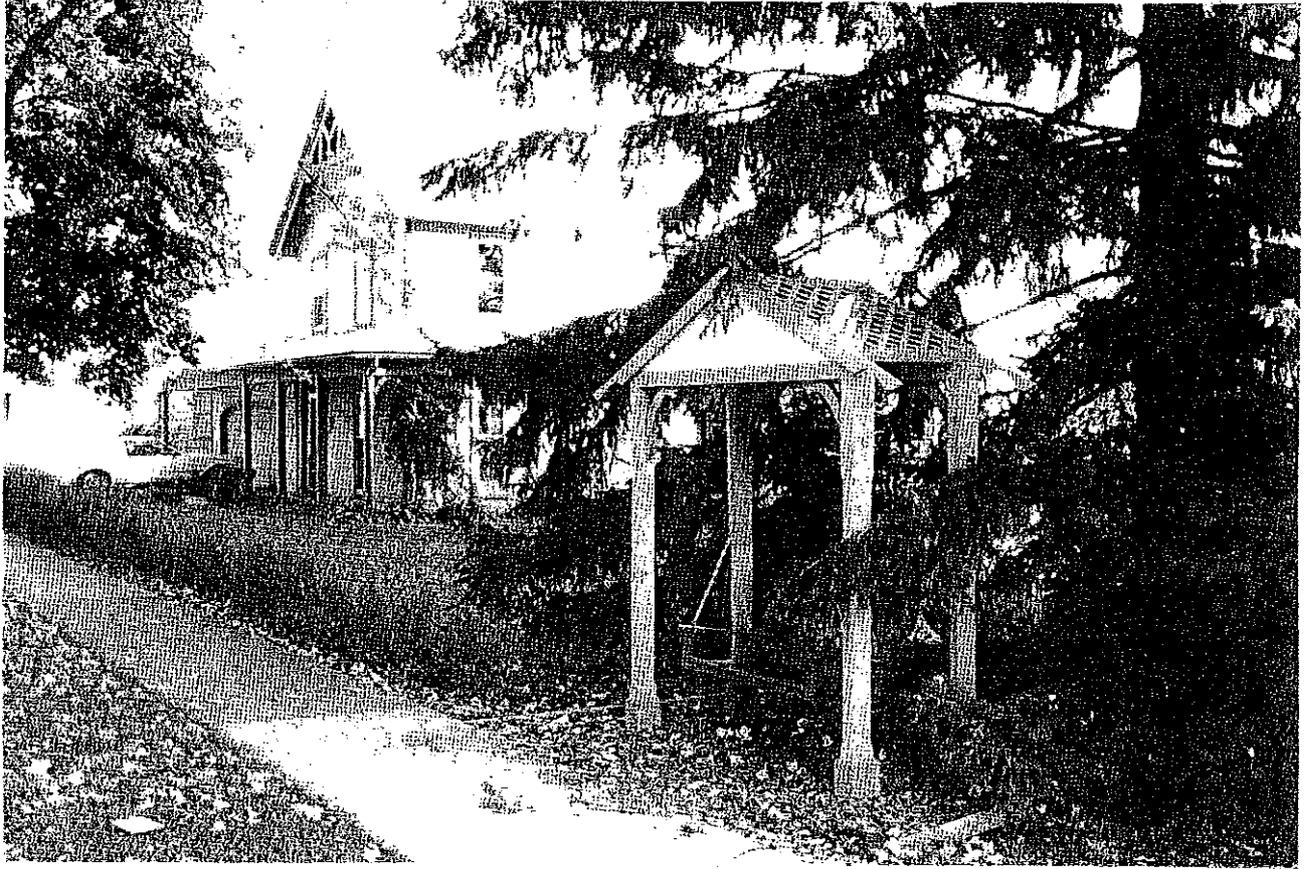
Mount Vernon in 1994 is a city divided between employers who work locally and those who are commuters to metropolitan jobs. In 1990, more than 900 of Mount Vernon's employees (51.43%) worked within fifteen minutes of home. More than 41% travel fewer than 10 minutes to get to work. Another 35.14% of workers commute between 20 and 35 minutes to work, incorporating Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. About 56.57% of all workers drive to work alone, 6.86% use carpools, and 28.80% walked. About 5.66% of employees worked at home, or used other modes of travel to work.

Conclusions

The economic analysis of Mount Vernon indicates that:

- Most of Mount Vernon's residents commute to work locally, and nearly one out of three walk to work. More than 35% of all workers commute to nearby cities for employment.
- The city's population is more likely to be employed in professional and managerial jobs than the overall metropolitan area population. This includes substantial representation in education and services employment.
- Incomes in Mount Vernon are well above those for the entire metropolitan area. The community has a high percentage of upper middle-income households, and has a relatively low percentage of low-income residents.

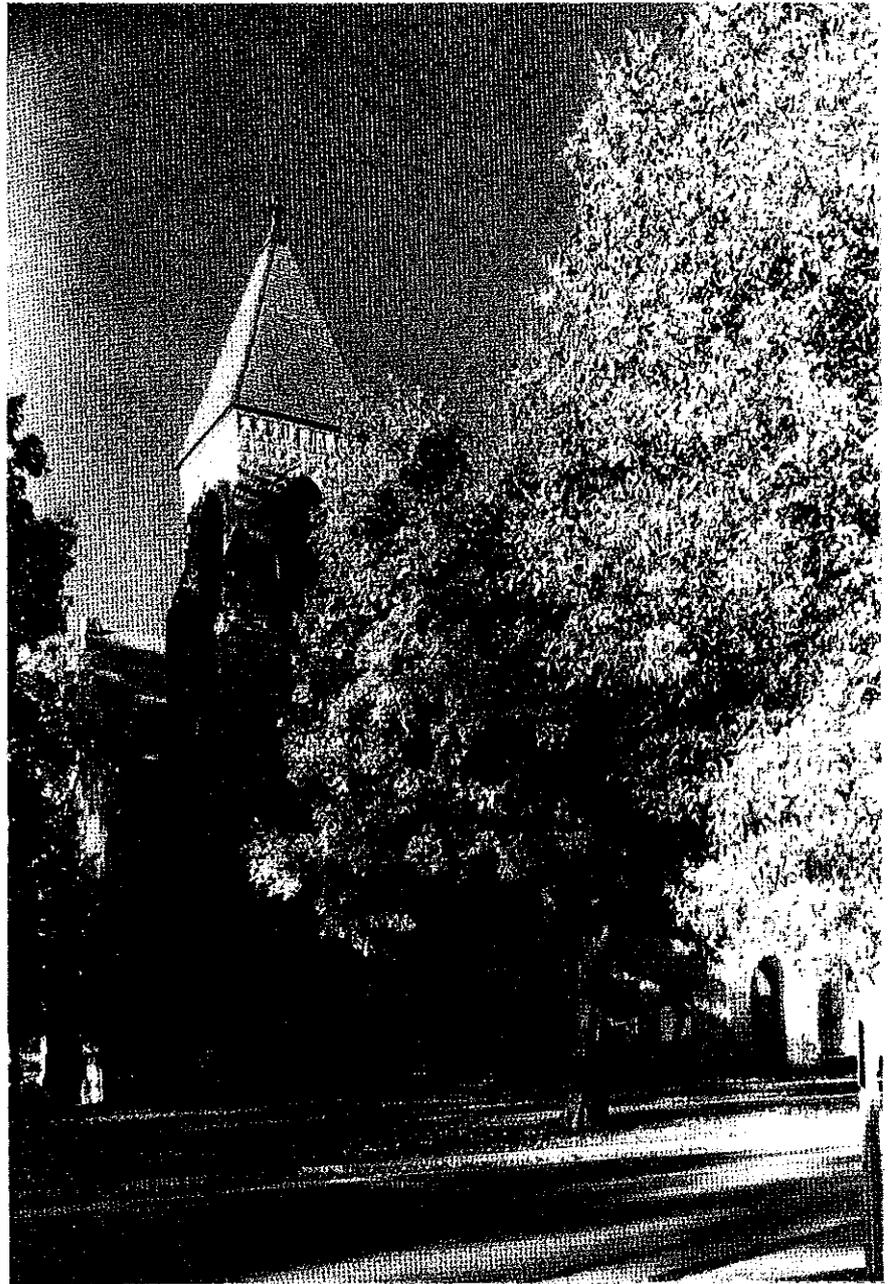
A PROFILE OF MOUNT VERNON



Swinging chair on First Street. This privately-built, public amenity reflects the importance that public space has in the lives of Mount Vernon's residents. First Street serves as a community commons and links many of Mount Vernon's civic assets.

A TIMELESS CITY

2



First Methodist Church.

A TIMELESS CITY



A DEVELOPMENT CONSTITUTION FOR MOUNT VERNON

Mount Vernon should maintain and enhance its town design character and will continue to grow as an interconnected, unified community.

Mount Vernon is a community of special qualities. Its natural setting and built environment create a special magic that residents and visitors to the community feel immediately -- a sense of timelessness, of a community that simultaneously touches and incorporates its past, present, and future.

Many images of the town contribute to this special sense. The twinkle of Christmas lights in Uptown's trees on a snowy December night, the tree-lined streets of the Ash Park Historic District, Cornell College's landmark campus, a property owner placing a bench and shelter for public use along First Street, and children on the sledding hill of North 2nd Avenue along with other images make Mount Vernon precious to its residents. These features make Mount Vernon a living community that in too many places is a fond but distant memory. Indeed, the preservation of these characteristics is vital to the town's well-being.

On the other hand, forces in and around Mount Vernon create changes that affect these traditional qualities. Mount Vernon is located within a metropolitan area, ten miles from the eastern edge of Cedar Rapids. Linn County's December 1993 Population and Economic Forecasts project a county-wide population increase of about 26,600 people or 15.8% between 1990 and 2020, propelled by a significant increase in regional employment. Natural decentralization of urban populations, combined with projected growth, places significant development pressure on Mount Vernon's highly desirable community environment. Contemporary retailing, with its strong orientation to the automobile, has also created conflicts with Mount Vernon's desire to maintain a strong traditional town center. Regional transportation changes also bring additional pressure to bear on the town. US 30, which

A DEVELOPMENT CONSTITUTION FOR MOUNT VERNON

once followed First Street through the town center, was relocated to its present alignment on the south edge of town in the 1950s. A proposed bypass will develop a new, limited access facility on a more southward alignment. Changes in traffic and access patterns, along with development types that often gravitate toward highway interchanges, add other pressures. As important, the scale and design of development that comes with these changes can be different from the character of traditional Mount Vernon.

In this context, Mount Vernon has struggled with the complex issue of maintaining community character in an environment of change. The town can proceed down different paths. A "no-growth" approach maintains the existing form of the town, but ignores the potential vitality that development can bring. As a result, the city finds itself attempting to maintain increasingly costly public services and facilities with a stagnant or slowly growing tax base. On the other hand, a policy of relatively uncontrolled growth can produce projects that are very different from traditional Mount Vernon in scale and function. As a result, the town environment that makes Mount Vernon distinctive and that draws people to it can be diluted.

A better policy for Mount Vernon involves encouraging controlled growth levels within the context of a traditional community. By understanding the patterns and relationships that make Mount Vernon beautiful, the town can develop principles for new growth and investment that reinforce, rather than destroy, the community's unique sense of place. As a result, the town can both accommodate growth and use it to improve community quality.

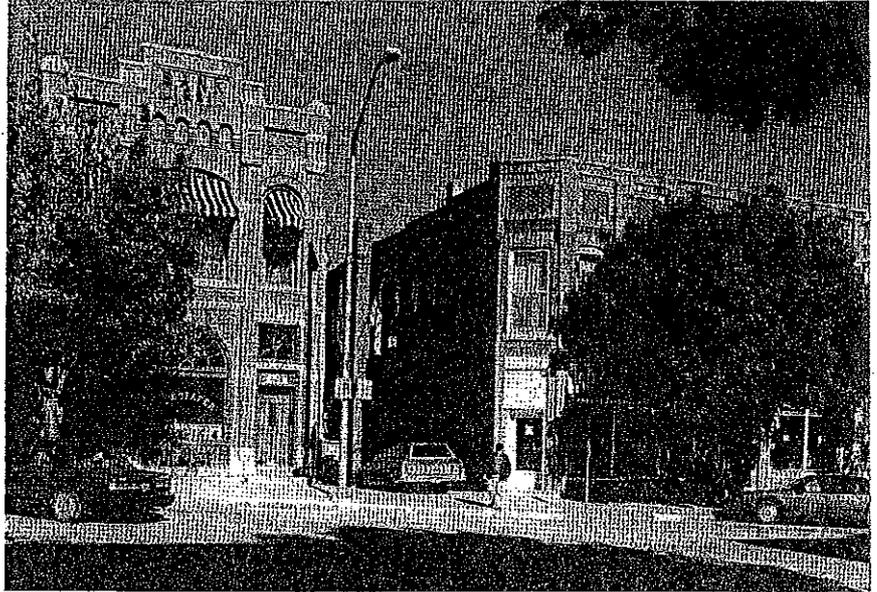
This section, then, considers the following physical features and patterns that give Mount Vernon a distinctive environment:

- TOPOGRAPHY
- CROSSROADS
- STREET AND BLOCK LAYOUT
- COMMUNITY STREET
- THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
- TOWN CENTER

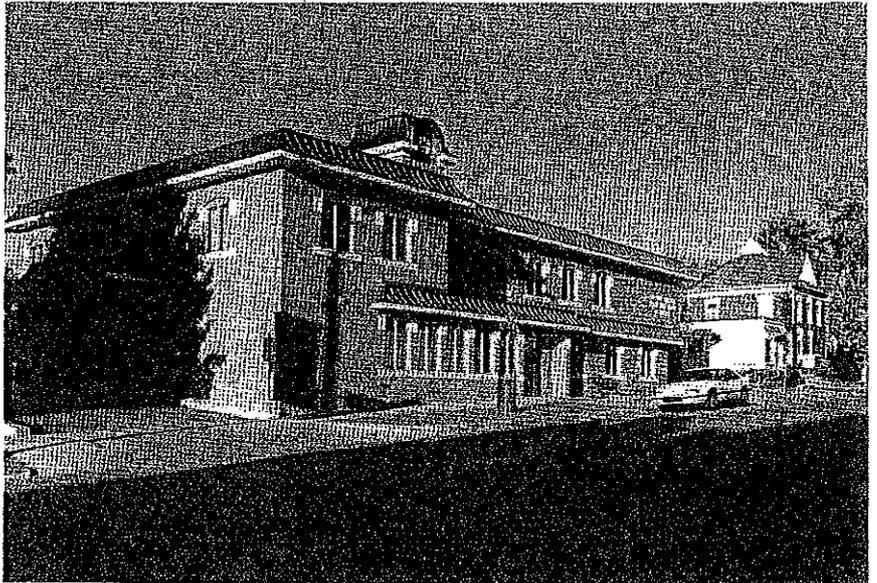
A DEVELOPMENT CONSTITUTION FOR MOUNT VERNON

It then presents a general philosophy for future community growth management, forming a Development Constitution that defines the general perspectives of this comprehensive plan.

Uptown. Mount Vernon's Town Center is one of three districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Mount Vernon Bank and Trust on 1st Street. This new structure maintains the patterns and character of traditional development in Mount Vernon's Uptown district.



View of Mount Vernon from the south. This ridge above the Cedar River Valley inspired the location of Cornell College and the townsite itself.



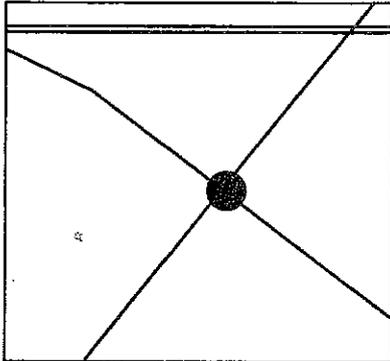
TOPOGRAPHY

"Prairie grass grew rank and high over the wind-swept hilltop of what is now Mount Vernon. Tall elms, oaks, linden trees perhaps a hundred years old grew on the west slope of the hill; and a less coverage of wild plum and crabapple trees sent forth delicious aroma in the spring. At the foot of the east end of the hill was a copious spring of water where travelers would stop to quench their thirst."

*- A Centennial History of Mount Vernon, Iowa
The Centennial Committee, 1948*

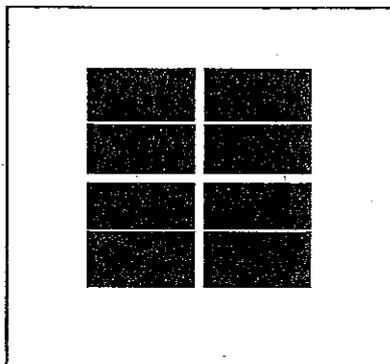
These topographic influences on the form of the city are still evident today. Mount Vernon's town center is located along a high ridge above the Cedar River Valley. Main Street (now 1st Street) followed this ridge to the east. George Bowman envisioned this same hilltop as a sacred location for a new institution dedicated to religious education -- a vision that was fulfilled with the 1852 groundbreaking of Cornell College.

This combination of commerce and vision created a community axis for many of Mount Vernon's great landmarks. The quality of a city on a ridge also defines the skyline from the surrounding countryside and causes travelers literally to "go up" to Mount Vernon as they approach its center.



CROSSROADS

Mount Vernon's form is defined by a crossroads, partially influenced by landforms and partially by transportation. A military road laid out in 1837 to connect the territorial capital at Iowa City with Dubuque became Highway 1 or 1st Avenue in Mount Vernon. The town's center grew at the junction of the ridge line and this Military Road. The geometry of these features generated a grid pattern that was rotated relative to the ordinal directions. Later, when the Chicago & North Western Railroad reached the town in 1859, it followed a more true east-west route, and created new residential additions (including the Ash Park Historic District) that also followed an ordinal orientation. The collision of these grids, North 6th Street, created small open spaces and unusual streetscapes.



STREET AND BLOCK LAYOUT

The street layout of the original plat of Mount Vernon was made up of nearly square blocks, about 285 feet on a side. Each block contained eight lots, oriented to the avenues and divided into two-lot "quadrants" by mid-block alleys running in each direction. The avenue orientation of lots was broken along First Street, where lots faced the main east-west street and the Bowman's and Hall's Additions between South 3rd and 5th Avenues.

This small block grid introduced a rhythm to the community and a high level of contact among blocks. As a result, most of traditional Mount Vernon functioned as one neighborhood, with a high degree of penetrability from one street to another. Mount Vernon developed as a compact, walkable city, a community in which people are as likely to travel on foot as by automobile.

The intimate rhythm created by small blocks was reinforced by the horizontal sections of streets, sidewalks, and building elevations. A typical cross-section includes a 28-foot wide street channel, 10- to 12-foot greenway strips between the curb line and the sidewalk, 4-foot sidewalks, and 15 to 20-foot front yard setbacks. This resulted in a distance between building fronts ranging from 93 to 100 feet. This distance,



combined with the landscape opportunities created by the town's relatively wide greenways, generated the town's superb residential streets.

COMMUNITY STREET

Main Street, now 1st Street, followed the ridge line that attracted commercial, religious, and educational visionaries to the townsite. This street evolved into a "community street," an important public space that links major community institutions and unites rather than divides neighborhoods. In American towns, community streets have a processional quality, becoming civic corridors that define the town and are magnets for people who are outside to exercise, experience the town, or see other people.

First Street is a superb example of a community street. Its sequence of historic buildings, open spaces, mature trees, and major community institutions create this special quality of a street that transcends its transportation role.

While the core of this "community street" is made up of the town center and Cornell College, the procession begins at Mount Vernon's eastern entrance, at the eastern foot of the town's hill. Here, 1st Street intersects Lisbon Road at Mount Vernon Cemetery and proceeds west across Spring Creek. Climbing the hill, the street passes the Middle School and enters Uptown. The procession leads through the town center, past the city's historic churches, and past Memorial Park with its Visitors Center and gazebo. The street continues along the edge of the historic Cornell Campus to the western entrance of the town.

This community street, once the route of the Lincoln Highway, also extends into the surrounding rural area. To the west, it becomes Mount Vernon Road, linking the town to Cedar Rapids past the historic Abbe Creek School. To the east, it becomes Lisbon Road which, with its adjacent bicycle path, connects to the neighboring community of Lisbon.



THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The architectural characteristics of Mount Vernon's buildings lend a third dimension to the interaction of land and layout in defining the character of the traditional town. The tower of King Chapel, high on the ridge, is Mount Vernon's most visible architectural landmark. However, the variety of high styles in the city's residential, institutional, and commercial architecture, including Victorian, Eastlake, Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, and Colonial, makes the community a showcase of nineteenth century design.

Traditional residential neighborhoods are marked by two-story buildings, again displaying a variety of high styles and vernacular design. Many of these structures include large porches, oriented to the fronting street. This residential scale, combined with the relatively small cross-sectional distances between building fronts and the generous landscaped greenways between curb and sidewalk create outdoor rooms that are at once spacious and intimate, green and urban.

The quality of the built environment is recognized by the designation of three National Register districts in the community. These include:

- The Cornell College/Mount Vernon Historic District, incorporating 120 structures that include the college and immediately surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- The Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District, including 27 buildings in the traditional town center.
- The Ash Park Historic District, including 42 houses between 6th and 8th Streets in the northern part of town.

Other residential districts display similar architectural quality. In addition, two-story brick houses, scattered around the traditional plat, reflect the settlement era of the 1850s, when builders brought clay to homesites and built houses of brick fired by on-site kilns.



TOWN CENTER

Mount Vernon's town center, located along the top of the ridge at the crossroads of 1st Avenue and 1st Street, has retained its vitality as the community's primary commercial and civic center. The continued vitality is caused by several factors, including:

- *The location of the district near the geographic center of town.* As Mount Vernon grew, it expanded concentrically around the original crossroads. As a result, the town center remained central to most of the community's residential neighborhoods.
- *The compact, walkable scale of the city, promoted by its small blocks, continuous street grid, and compact development pattern.* Short distances have made walking a primary means of transportation in Mount Vernon. This, coupled with the central location of the town center, maintained the district's position in the community.
- *The connections between the traditional center and surrounding residential neighborhoods.* The uptown district blends into its surroundings, rather than being separated from them.
- *The scale and character of the district itself.* The commercial district, listed on the National Register, forms an edge of one and two-story brick structures that are excellent examples of nineteenth century commercial architecture. As in other parts of the community, the relatively short distance between opposite building faces maintains the intimacy of an outdoor room, important in a commercial area where the ability to cross a shopping street easily is important. The recent addition of street trees repeats the combination of soft and urban surfaces that is also distinctive in residential areas.
- *Regulatory environment.* Mount Vernon has adopted a protectionist policy toward its traditional town center. Thus, commercial zoning for highway commercial areas is relatively restrictive, prohibiting some retail and service uses which would compete with the traditional town center.

The Lincoln Highway symbolized the transcendence of the automobile and other technologies in American life. The connection with Cedar Rapids by a transcontinental highway in effect brought Mount Vernon "closer" to Cedar Rapids. In many ways, it marked the beginning of Mount Vernon's position as a satellite residential community of the county seat. In addition, the Lincoln Highway brought tourists and other travelers past the Cornell campus and through the heart of Mount Vernon.

- Historic Resources of Mount Vernon, National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form

The previous discussion has described features and relationships that over time have made Mount Vernon distinctive. Yet, the forces that have changed town building and community development patterns in contemporary times also challenge Mount Vernon's traditional character. These challenges include:

- HIGHWAY ROUTES AND LAND PATTERNS
- REGIONAL GROWTH
- COMMERCIAL DEMANDS
- SUBDIVISION PATTERNS
- LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

HIGHWAY ROUTES AND LAND PATTERNS

Along with many other Iowa communities, Mount Vernon's history and development form was determined by topography, regional settlement patterns, and road routes rather than by railroad development. The Iowa City to Dubuque Military Road became Iowa Highway 1 and was a part of the original town plat. In 1913, the transcontinental Lincoln Highway (US 30) was established and was routed through Mount Vernon along 1st Street. While the Lincoln Highway encouraged the conversion of some commercial buildings to more automobile-oriented uses, its passage through a built-up town had little impact on building scale or new development activity.

In 1953, US 30 was rerouted to a bypass on the south side of town, south of South 7th Street. This new bypass created a significant barrier on the south edge of the city, crossed only by two streets -- Highway 1 and an extension of 1st Street. In addition, it created opportunities for new, more automobile-oriented commercial development by providing access to open land. As a result, large lots were subdivided, with development concentrated at the crossroads of the new US 30 and Highway 1, and land development patterns emerged that included individual free-standing buildings and street-yard parking lots. This commercial intersection at the edge of the city, combined with its lack of safe pedestrian facilities, causes customers to drive rather than walk to commercial facilities.

The Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) plans to build a new US 30 route, bypassing the current alignment to the south. As part of the Iowa 2000 Commercial Highway Network, this highway will be a four-lane divided, limited access facility with an interchange at Highway 1. The character of this road, its effect on surrounding land use patterns, and the disposition of the former US 30 alignment pose major challenges for the town.

REGIONAL GROWTH

Mount Vernon will experience development pressure caused by two forces: population decentralization and countywide employment and population growth. Cedar Rapids, in common with other Midwestern central cities, has experienced a trend toward suburbanization and lower density housing. Since the development of the Lincoln Highway, many Mount Vernon residents commute to Cedar Rapids. The improved access provided by an upgraded US 30, combined with the attractiveness of Mount Vernon as a living environment, will cause significant demand for new residential development. Commuter growth from Iowa City presents a secondary demand for new housing in Mount Vernon. These trends create development pressures that are independent of regional population growth.

In addition, growth forecasts suggest development demands placed on Mount Vernon created by new employment and population in the region. Population and Employment Forecasts (PEFTAC) completed by the Linn County Regional Planning Commission, indicate an increase of 20,200 jobs (or 21.4%) between 1990 and 2010 and an employment increase of 31,640 (or 33.6%) between 1990 and 2020. This will generate population increases of 17,298 (or 10.3%) and 26,601 (or 15.8%) respectively for the next 20- and 30-years. A portion of this countywide growth will be directed toward Mount Vernon. If Mount Vernon does no more than capture its current proportion of countywide population, this projected growth will generate a 20-year increase ranging from 276 to 374 people and a 30-year increase of 425 to 577 people. Converted to housing unit demand, this suggests a 20-year demand for 150 additional units and a 30-year additional demand for 231 units.

COMMERCIAL DEMANDS

New population growth and improved access also create commercial development pressures. The character of new commercial development, usually designed to accommodate automobiles, is different from traditional patterns in the town center. While the traditional center is small in scale, relates buildings to one another in a district, has a pedestrian orientation, and de-emphasizes parking, more contemporary commercial development usually includes free-standing buildings, individual parking lots that separate the building from the street, and poor pedestrian accommodations.

In addition, highway-oriented commercial development may present a direct threat to the strength of the traditional business district. For example, discount retailers, drawn to a point of high accessibility such as the US 30/Highway 1 interchange, may compete directly with "Main Street" stores in the Uptown district. This concern for preservation of the community commercial role of Uptown has caused Mount Vernon to adopt restrictive Highway Commercial zoning standards that limit retail and service uses at the intersection. However, the town continues to experience internal and external development demands created by new population, changing retail trends, and improved regional access.

SUBDIVISION PATTERNS

Traditional residential development patterns in Mount Vernon include the 285-foot square blocks, containing eight lots, of the original plat of Mount Vernon; the slightly longer blocks of the Ash Park district; and the more informal, curvilinear pattern of the Boulevard Addition west of the Cornell campus. These different grids provide variety within the context of a connected street network and help define the urban character of Mount Vernon.

Contemporary subdivision development follows different patterns. Generally, new subdivisions:

- Provide new streets that provide internal access to individual lots, rather than fitting into a pre-planned street network.
- Use curved streets and cul-de-sacs which establish new

additions as development pods that are unrelated to surrounding areas.

- Provide larger lots than those in the traditional town.
- Have larger distances between building faces on either side of a street.

These patterns are evident in the Crestview and Candlestick Additions. While these subdivisions provide excellent homes, they are not consistent with the character of the traditional town. As a result, new development could ring the community with residential areas that are unrelated and ultimately separated from the rest of the city. The character of new growth and its relationship to the existing town presents a fundamental challenge for Mount Vernon.

LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Contemporary land development regulations, including zoning and subdivision controls, follow principles of single use zoning districts and numerical regulators such as minimum setbacks from property lines. Frequently, these regulations are copied from the ordinances of other towns, which have been copied themselves. They often have little relevance to the characteristics that make communities unique, instead tending to make every community look alike.

For example, Mount Vernon's current zoning and subdivision standards mandate a typical distance of 130 feet between facing homes in new subdivisions (35-foot front yard setbacks and 60-foot minimum right-of-way widths). In contrast, the residential streets of traditional Mount Vernon display typical separations between facing houses of 95 to 100 feet. This 30% increase in building separation has a major impact on the character of residential streets. Yet, a developer could not build a modern version of traditional Mount Vernon. *The town's development regulations specifically make it impossible to build new neighborhoods that reflect the character of the city's historic areas.*