

CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

2016 Comprehensive Plan



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Chalk the Walk Festival, Main Street Mount Vernon

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Executive Summary

ECICOG, in partnership with the City of Mount Vernon, provided coordination, planning and facilitation support to identify recommendations and strategies for the long-term growth and development of the city. This plan is the culmination of that work. The Mount Vernon Plan provides a comprehensive vision of the city's future to direct development which reinforces the unique, existing character of the city.

This document contains information essential for future planning efforts, including land use policies and objectives. It is a coordinated guide for continued planning and development in order to manage growth and make the most efficient possible use of the city's resources. It can also serve as a reference and guide for other research or grant applications by city leaders for the general betterment of the community.

In addition, this Plan utilizes the State of Iowa Smart Planning legislation. The legislation, adopted by the State in 2010, established 10 Smart Planning principles and 13 smart planning elements which helped guide the planning process.

ECICOG appreciates the efforts of the Mount Vernon Planning Committee members who have contributed their time and ideas to the formulation of this plan. Also, special thanks to many citizens of the community. Their input has made this document a pertinent and meaningful plan which represents the needs and desires of the people in and around Mount Vernon. Efforts focused on important opportunities to advance appropriate growth through the year 2035, including a community visioning process; the development of strategies addressing business development, land use, infrastructure and a discussion of future housing issues and needs.

Executive Summary

The Mount Vernon Plan presents a strategy-oriented approach to future development. The plan includes eight chapters which correspond to the town's most important physical development issues. Many of these issues are interrelated. As such, the traditional sections of a comprehensive plan, such as land use, housing and infrastructure are organized as recurring themes throughout the plan. This enables the plan to tell the story of the city's future development and present an integrated program for appropriate growth.

The overriding theme of the Mount Vernon Plan, based on the results of the planning process and public input, involves accommodating and encouraging environmentally conscientious and sustainable new growth and investment while maintaining the town's traditional and distinctive urban character. There will be challenges. Among others, funding, development constraints, and changing demographics will all present unique challenges for Mount Vernon. Each chapter in the plan will address these challenges and offer strategies for ensuring the community's future livability.

Key chapters of the plan include the following:

Quality of Life. Perhaps the most important element in the plan is Mount Vernon's quality of life. Mount Vernon is sought by residents and visitors for its historic character, culture, quality education, green space, recreation, environmental stewardship, healthy living and abundant amenities. Its natural setting and modern use of three historic districts create a special sense of timelessness. In order to thrive, the city must solidify its position as the vibrant small-town of choice in Iowa's Creative Corridor. As the plan looks ahead twenty years, the city must focus on preserving and enhancing its quality of life through sustainable development practices, historic preservation of Main Street, preservation of its traditional neighborhoods, appropriate development of a Highway 30 bypass area, and strategic investment by the city annually in economic and community development.

Executive Summary

Housing. Over the years, Mount Vernon has successfully encouraged young families to live in the community because of the excellent community schools and Cornell College, coupled with its historic character and quality of life. However, there is a shortage of housing for many families and senior citizens. Based on census analysis, building permit records and conversations with Mount Vernon citizens, the recommendations contained in this plan include the establishment of a Housing Commission to focus on current housing issues, housing rehabilitation, preservation of traditional neighborhoods and integration of new housing construction to be consistent with the city's historic character and quality of life.

Economic Development. A well-defined economic vision and accompanying strategy for achieving that vision is essential for Mount Vernon's long-term growth and stability. Well-planned development is the foundation of the community's tax base, public schools, housing and infrastructure. Vision and strategies require focused commitment and City Council leadership that inspires the business community, community volunteers and philanthropists. The complexity, competitiveness and critical priority of this community's economic strategies will require retaining professional consultation, and more importantly, partnerships which should be funded by the city.

Infrastructure and Transportation. Growth and development within the community cannot be effectively achieved unless Mount Vernon maintains its current infrastructure. Thus, it is essential that the city develop a plan for the systematic replacement of aging streets, sidewalks, sewers, and water lines. As the city grows to the west and south, new streets will need to be added. The city has a West Side Long Range Transportation Plan prepared in 2007, but no such plan exists for the area between Highway 30 and the bypass. When the bypass goes in, this will be a prime area for development, and the city will need to have a transportation plan ready for that development.

Executive Summary

In addition, the City of Mount Vernon and the Community Development Group (CDG) partnered to produce a Streetscape Development Plan in 2010. Also the Mount Vernon Visioning Committee worked with Trees Forever, faculty and staff from ISU, and design interns from ISU to produce a plan for Mount Vernon that focused on trail connectivity and safety, integrated signage, and a unified transportation system. The implementation of these plans would make Mount Vernon a more attractive place for residents, businesses and tourists.

City Facilities. Mount Vernon enjoys a wealth of government/public facilities - city hall, law enforcement and fire protection, libraries, educational institutions, and other public-oriented services - that support and enhance its livability. Although some of these facilities are often taken for granted, they are central to the overall functioning of the community. As Mount Vernon looks to the future, it needs to pay special heed to these facilities. Specifically, the community should maintain the high quality of public services in the most efficient and effective way possible. Public services must be designed to address the needs and demands of current and future development through collaboration and coordination of major stakeholders. Further, the community needs to pro-actively develop a long range facilities plan, including a budget and timeframe designed to support Mount Vernon's future development objectives.

Land Use. The Land Use chapter brings the entire plan full circle by connecting key areas and presents a detailed recommendation of appropriate future development. The plan establishes four future growth areas, including traditional residential to the west and north, suburban residential to the south and general commercial, business park and light industrial to the south near the proposed Highway 30 bypass area. New development must occur in ways that enhance the community's traditional urban character and overall quality of life. To meet the challenges of future development and ensure orderly and efficient growth, the plan addresses tools such as zoning, annexation policies and fringe-area agreements.

If city leaders follow the recommendations contained in these chapters, future development will reinforce the existing character of the city and residents will continue to enjoy the quality of life that Mount Vernon has to offer.



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Introduction

Introduction

The Mount Vernon Plan

The plan is intended to be a guide for the City of Mount Vernon to coordinate growth and development over the course of the next twenty years. The plan is focused on the area within the current city limits and in the surrounding future growth boundary outside the city. There are significant changes approaching that could ultimately impact Mount Vernon's future livability. These changes include the new Highway 30 bypass that could present challenges to the city's Uptown District while, simultaneously, offering opportunities for economic growth. Also, Cornell College's anticipated 25% growth in its student population over the next ten years could present challenges to the community ranging from land use issues to housing needs.

The plan sets out to address these challenges. Utilizing Iowa's new Smart Growth principles and elements (<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/Published/LGR/83/SF2265.pdf>), the plan attempts to provide a clear and compelling vision for the next twenty years by including an in-depth look at the city's population, housing, economic base, transportation, public and recreational facilities, physical infrastructure and current and future land uses. In addition, broad citywide goals are outlined and policy guidelines are recommended to achieve those goals. The plan, however, is not meant to be a strict blueprint, but rather a guide for officials in their decision-making.

City leaders should be reminded that the plan is not a regulatory document, but a policy statement. By considering the impact of future development well into the future, a community vision can be established to guide the development of regulatory tools such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, housing and building codes and annexation procedures.

The plan has two fundamental purposes. First, it presents a unified vision for Mount Vernon articulated from the hard work and participation of the citizens who devoted their time and effort toward creating this plan. Secondly, it provides the legal basis for land use regulation such as zoning and subdivision ordinances.

Introduction

The Planning Process

Provisions should be made for amending this document as policies and data become outdated. This authority should be used with discretion, however, since much of its value can easily be lost through frequent or arbitrary changes. Amendments may be proposed by the Planning and Zoning Commission, the City Council, or by concerned citizens. Any proposal must always be referred to the Planning and Zoning commission for consideration and recommendation to the Council.

The planning process should be an ongoing endeavor. The success of this plan will require the support of citizens as well as the City Council. Cooperation from the public and private sectors will provide long-term benefits to the entire planning area and ultimately the City of Mount Vernon.

Since the planning process is ongoing, it is important to identify a preferred vision for the future of Mount Vernon. Based on the input from the planning committee and results of the community-wide input, it was felt the overriding policy statement should be as follows:

Mount Vernon must accommodate and encourage new growth and investment while maintaining the town's traditional and distinctive urban character.

The goals and policies contained in this comprehensive plan will allow the city to manage the growth projected for Mount Vernon while maintaining the existing small-town character residents have come to enjoy.

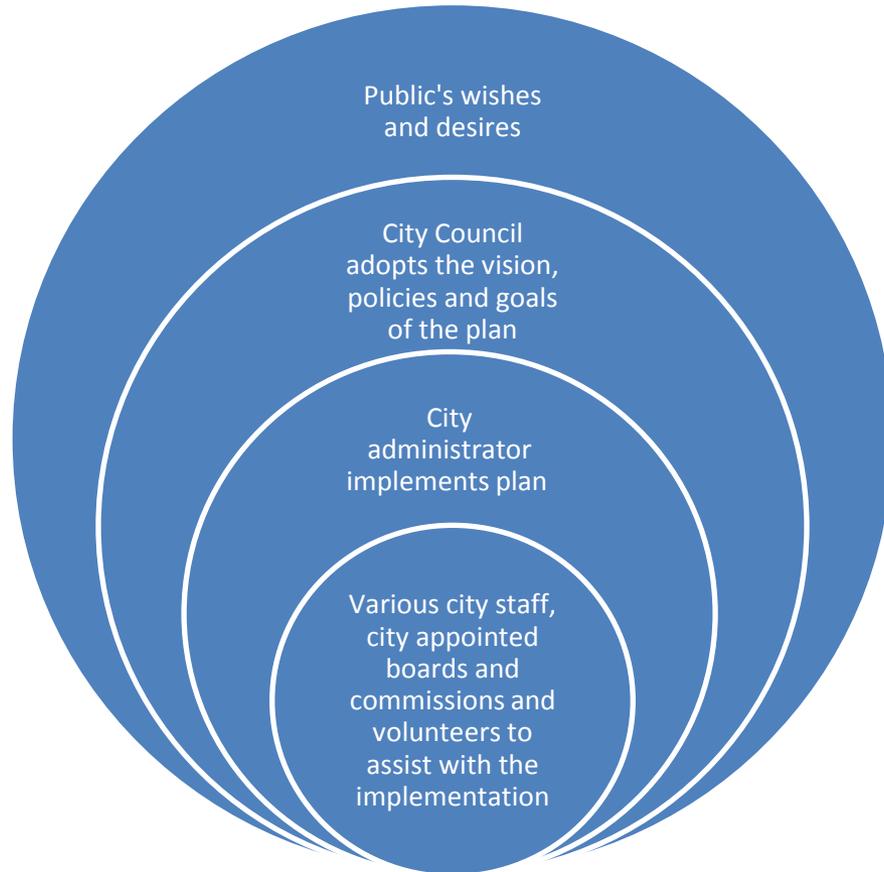
Introduction

How to Use This Document

It is recommended that the city identify someone to manage and lead implementation of action steps detailed in this plan and other actions as they are identified. It is important to have someone responsible for guiding ongoing future planning efforts. The city administrator should be the driving force in implementing the plan's policies and goals. Various staff, boards, commissions, volunteers and professional groups will be available to assist the city administrator in the implementation of the plan.

The Implementation Chapter (page 93) establishes key stakeholders that will assist the city administrator with the implementation of the plan's actionable items.

The following diagram shows a concept of how the plan should be used. The public's wishes and desires should always be considered when the Council adopts the plan. Once adopted, the city administrator implements the goals and policies contained herein.



Introduction

It is also recommended that the entire plan be carefully reviewed annually to ensure that the data and land use maps are updated. Policies may have to be updated as well. The review may be simple if the city has not grown in the years prior to the review or it may be more elaborate following a period of rapid growth or change. The results of the review and revision may very well mean changes in the zoning or subdivision ordinances or other developmental tools. The review should come in the form of an annual meeting between the City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission. This meeting should review the year's development to see if the plan is working.

Successful communities do not just happen. They must be continually shaped and guided. New issues and opportunities will inevitably arise. While no plan could possibly foresee every issue, the goals and strategies developed in the 2016 Mount Vernon Plan will provide flexibility for city officials and area residents in successfully planning for the future.



Memorial Park Gazebo, Mount Vernon

Introduction

LOST Funding

Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) funds have been collecting for the City of Mount Vernon and will sunset on June 30, 2034. The annual estimate of available LOST funding for the city is approximately \$250,000. This is the third round of LOST funding for Mount Vernon. LOST II funding was designated for infrastructure improvements and, as of April 2015, still has a balance of funds to be used. LOST I funding was designated for the community center and fire station and also has funds remaining.

LOST III funds being collected now are legally allocated in the following manner:

55% - Streets and city owned sidewalks

25% - Community center

10% - Parks and recreation

10% - Urban renewal

It should be noted that many of the proposed projects contained in the plan are eligible to use this important funding source. The long-term growth of the City of Mount Vernon depends on a variety of critical investments. LOST funding will play a significant roll in the implementation of this plan. Any future LOST funding rounds should be allocated to be aligned with the major projects contained in the comprehensive plan.



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Profile and Analysis

Profile and Analysis

Population Trends and Projections

A planning program for the physical development of a community must be based upon the requirements, both present and future, of the citizens living in the area. In order to establish what these requirements will be, it is necessary to know as accurately as possible how many people will be living in the area in the foreseeable future.

Precise predictions of future populations, of course, are not possible. However, a reasonable, reliable forecast can be made on the basis of past studies, population trends over the years, and current, observable patterns. This is essential in arriving at reasonable goals and objectives with respect to services and overall development.

The following section of the plan will review the City of Mount Vernon's demographics and growing population.

Mount Vernon Population Quick View

1990	2000	% Change 1990-2000	2010	% Change 2000-2010
3,657	3,871	5.9%	4,506	16.4%

Source: U.S. Census

The U.S. Census is estimating that the population of Mount Vernon in July 2012 has continued to grow to 4,583 residents. This represents nearly a 2% growth rate since 2010.

Profile and Analysis

Population Trends

Mount Vernon has seen fairly steady population growth since the early 1900's. For a graphic illustration of this fact, please refer to the chart on the following page. There is the anomaly during the 1990s where the city lost 7.3 percent of its population. This was a mistake in the U.S. Census reporting - the city actually grew at a modest rate.

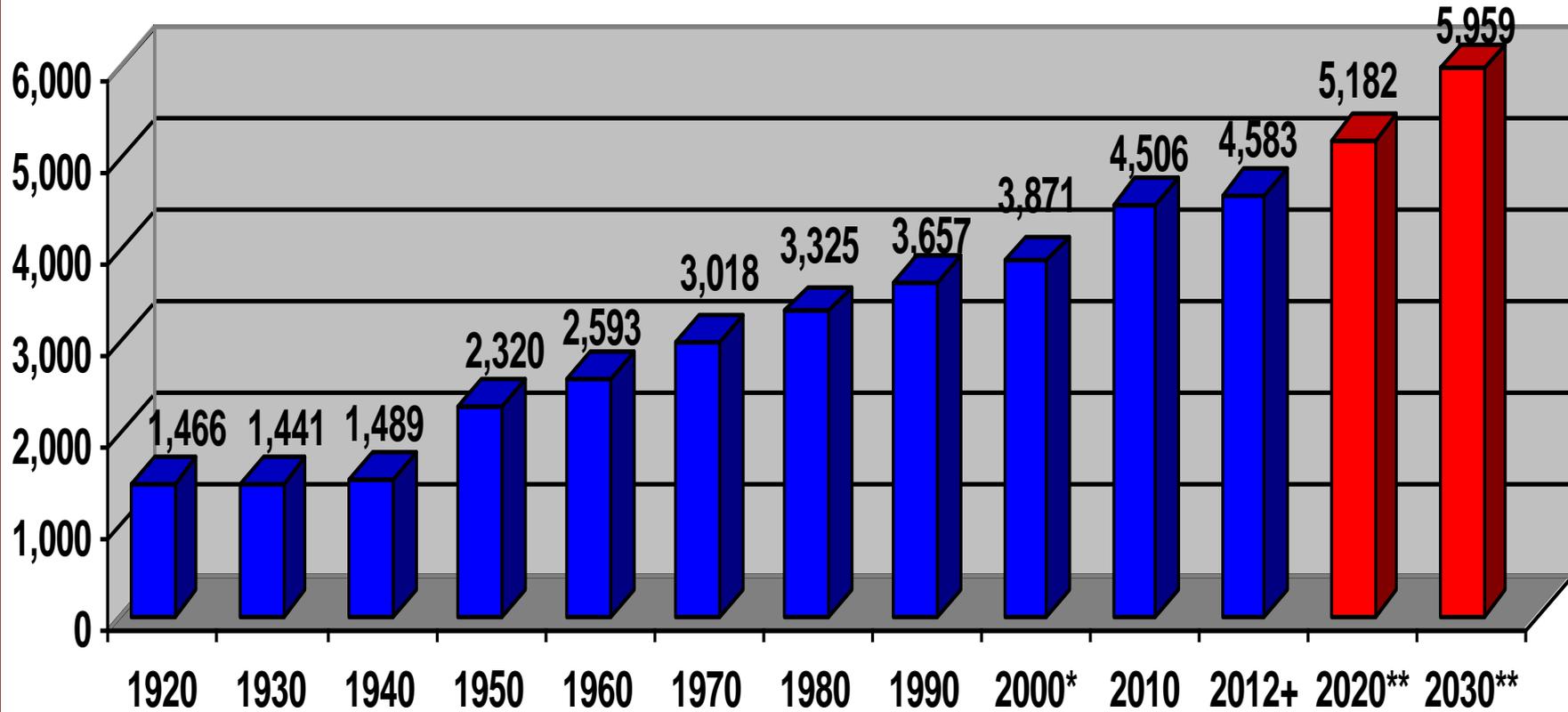
More recently, according to the U.S. Census, Mount Vernon realized a substantial 32.9 percent increase in population from 2000 to 2010 bringing the city's population to 4,506. While the end result is correct (a 2010 population of 4,506) the city did not actually grow at nearly 33 percent. The large growth rate is because of the Census reporting mistake in 2000, but the population is now correct. The actual growth rate was 16.4 percent from 2000 to 2010.

A 2012 Census estimate has put the city's population at 4,583 – a two-year growth rate from 2010 of nearly 2 percent in two years. A 2013 estimate was established based on building permit data from the city. Using 2.4 people per household and 18 new homes constructed since 2010, the 2013 estimated population was 4,626.

The projected populations for 2020 and 2030 are shown on the chart and discussed later in the chapter. The population is expected to be over 5,180 residents by 2020 and nearly 6,000 by 2030. Although very large population increases are generally difficult to maintain as the population increases, Mount Vernon's location along a major transportation corridor and access to two metropolitan areas will likely ensure population increases will continue during the life of this plan.

Profile and Analysis

Population Trends, City of Mount Vernon (1920 – 2012)



Source: U.S. Census

* 2000 is the corrected U.S. Census number, containing the 481 students that were not counted in the original 2000 Census

+ 2012 is a U.S. Census estimate

** 2020 and 2030 predictions are based on a 15% growth rate

Profile and Analysis

The population growth of Mount Vernon during the last fifteen years may be due in part to its location near the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City metropolitan areas and the ease of access between these two major job centers. New development areas to the west of the core city have also prompted growth.

If the national and local economies continue their recovery, growth in the two metro areas should continue to expand outward to cities like Mount Vernon, Central City and Center Point. Mount Vernon may see additional residents who work in the metro area yet live in the outlying areas. Also, as Mount Vernon's economic development efforts grow, there will likely be more employment locally, creating additional population growth.

However, if gas prices increase dramatically, commuters may be less likely to move great distances from where they work. Unless Mount Vernon's economic development efforts bring more employment locally, this factor alone may slow Mount Vernon's future growth potential relative to larger cities with employment opportunities.

Population Growth of Similar Sized Cities

There are several communities within the region that had relatively similar populations and situations as Mount Vernon. Each community is located within a short drive of the Cedar Rapids metro area. Since 1990, all five cities have experienced varying degrees of growth (see the chart on page 22).

Profile and Analysis

There are basically four types of cities within the region.

- 1) Large metro area cities (Cedar Rapids, Iowa City)
- 2) Cities directly adjacent to the metro areas (Tiffin, Fairfax, Ely, Robins, etc.)
- 3) Mid-size, stand-alone cities (Mount Vernon, Vinton, Anamosa, Washington, etc.)
- 4) Small, rural towns and villages (Garrison, Luzerne, Mount Auburn, etc.)

The cities located directly adjacent to Cedar Rapids or Iowa City, such as Fairfax and Tiffin, have experienced substantial growth during the 1990s and 2000s. Population trends of this nature may come with a negative cost to a city, such as lack of housing space, loss of farm land, increased need for infrastructure and other services, and the extreme cost of those services, as well as the loss of the small-town character. Many other cities near the Cedar Rapids metro area have experienced growth rates in the upper teens and more, such as Hiawatha and Center Point, or the Iowa City metro area like North Liberty or Coralville.

Cities such as Vinton, Anamosa and Washington are all stand-alone cities. They are the employment centers of their respective counties. These cities have not seen the double and triple digit percentage growth rates like North Liberty, Fairfax and Tiffin have seen. But they have had steady growth. Population increases between 5 and 10% are generally more likely for these communities. Many cities find it easier to plan and budget for infrastructure costs when the growth rate is in the 5 to 10% range. When much larger growth rates are projected, it is imperative that the community has a plan for the logical extension of services to manage the growth.

Profile and Analysis

Mount Vernon is unique in that it shares a border with another community in Lisbon. While not the employment center of Linn County, Mount Vernon is a mid-sized, stand-alone city with a solid Uptown district, excellent private liberal arts college and a growing employment and entertainment base.

From the City's 1995 Comprehensive Plan:

**“Mount Vernon is a classic small college town making
the transformation into a larger community.”**

Based on the population growth since 2000, that quote is as true today as it was in 1995.

Population Trends of Similar Sized Cities						
City	1990	2000	Change (%)	2010	Change (%)	County
Anamosa	5,100	5,494	7.7%	5,533	0.7%	Jones
Vinton	5,103	5,102	0.0%	5,257	3.0%	Benton
Monticello	3,522	3,607	2.4%	3,796	5.2%	Jones
Center Point	1,693	2,007	18.5%	2,421	20.6%	Linn
Lisbon	1,452	1,898	30.7%	2,152	13.4%	Linn
Mount Vernon	3,657	3,871	5.9%	4,506	16.4%	Linn

Source: U.S. Census

Profile and Analysis

The one constant between most cities in the region experiencing growth is the link to the Cedar Rapids or Iowa City metro areas. Mount Vernon's link to both metro areas should position the community for continued future expansion.

Population Projections

As stated before, population projections can be used to plan for the appropriate level of services for future development. When used cautiously, population projections provide an estimate of future growth barring any unforeseen significant change in the economic or social composition of the community. With a sound population projection, a city can plan for infrastructure capacities, housing needs, and future land use requirements.

City of Mount Vernon Population Projections				
Projected Growth	2010	2012 (estimate)	2020	2030
5% Growth rate	4,506	4,583	4,732	4,969
15% Growth rate	4,506	4,583	5,182	5,959
25% Growth rate	4,506	4,583	5,633	7,041
35% Growth rate	4,506	4,583	6,083	7,634

Source: ECICOG

The above table shows several population projections for Mount Vernon. Four different scenarios are shown for comparison. The growth rates shown in the table represent the percentage increase per decade (between each census period). In each projection, Mount Vernon realizes population growth.

Profile and Analysis

Based on regional trends of the last 20 years (high residential growth surrounding the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City metro areas, and growth of cities of similar size to Mount Vernon in the ECICOG Planning Region), and the location of a major transportation corridor running near the city (Highway 30) connecting it to Cedar Rapids and beyond, the population is expected to continue to increase at rates around 15 percent. This projection does not factor into consideration that Cornell College has tentative plans to increase student enrollment by nearly 500 by 2020. That alone would increase the city's rate of growth to nearly 25 percent by 2020. As it is, the college student population represents a sizeable percentage of Mount Vernon's overall population that could impact future projections.

Building permit data from the city, discussed later in the plan, shows that only 18 new homes have been built since 2010. Using this data to project the population, suggests that an 8% growth rate is possible.

As mentioned before, it is unlikely that the city will be able to maintain large percentage growth rates (as shown by the 35% projection above). As the population increases, large percentage changes are more difficult. In addition, the economy, rising fuel and heating costs, the amount of developable land and available community services (sewer, water, police, roads, etc.) will ultimately dictate how fast Mount Vernon grows. Very large percentage growth rates can be a burden on community services. The 35% projection is shown in the unlikely event that extraordinary growth rates will continue over the long-term. It is possible rising energy and fuel prices will slow housing construction in outlying areas of the county and reduce the likelihood that commuters would be willing to drive long distances to work.

Profile and Analysis

However, as mentioned before, barring any unforeseen significant change in the economic or social composition of the region, the population should realize a 15% growth rate through 2030. A population near 6,000 could be expected by that time. For planning purposes, the 15% projection will be used throughout the document when discussing future infrastructure capacities, housing and land use needs.

Here is a look at the 1995 Mount Vernon Comprehensive Plan population projections for comparison purposes. The 1995 plan used four different percentage growth rates (4%, 6%, 10% and 20%) through 2010 and generally utilized the 10% growth rate as the likely potential for growth.

1995 Mount Vernon Comprehensive Plan Population Projections

	2000	2005	2010
Population	3,814	4,070	4,261

Source: City of Mount Vernon 1995 Comprehensive Plan

Land Use Implications

The Land Use portion of the plan will look at the amount of undeveloped land remaining within the city limits and examine possible appropriate future growth areas outside of the existing city boundaries to facilitate this future growth. As stated before, population projections should be used cautiously. Changes in local, state and national economies can have a profound effect on population counts. The rising cost of oil and natural gas could very well continue to negatively impact the economy, making even the lower percentage growth rates unattainable. However, with the proximity to employment and retail centers, major transportation routes and available land and services, the city's population may be able to withstand small changes in the national economy and reach the plan's projected total of nearly 6,000 by the year 2030.

Profile and Analysis

Demographics

Age Cohorts

Population projections are used to plan appropriately for future growth and development. Breaking down the population by demographics is just as important to the planning process by showing the related demographic needs of the community.

As seen in the table on the following page, in 2010, Mount Vernon had a fairly balanced age make-up with the median age of residents at 24.4 according to the US Census. This is significantly younger than the median age of the state of Iowa at 38.1, and Mount Vernon is generally much younger than the region as a whole. Of course, this number is skewed because of the student enrollment of Cornell College. Removing the students (1,197), the population of the city drops to just over 3,300, while the median age increases only to 26. Again, this is still significantly younger than the state of Iowa.

The largest group, outside of the student population, based on percentage is children under the age of nineteen. The second largest group would be in the prime employment stage of life at 35 to 49 years of age. The smallest groups include those over 75 years of age.

These findings suggest that Mount Vernon has successfully attracted young adults and their young families, but has been less successful at retaining residents in the senior cohorts. This may be related to a lack of housing settings which meet the needs of the elderly. Comments from the town meeting suggest that the lack of senior housing is an issue for the community.

Profile and Analysis

Age Cohorts	Male	Female	Total
0 to 9 years	281	281	562
10 to 14 years	152	139	291
15 to 19 years	299	335	634
20 to 24 years	395	398	793
25 to 29 years	104	102	206
30 to 34 years	99	115	214
35 to 39 years	120	106	226
40 to 44 years	125	120	245
45 to 49 years	122	147	269
50 to 54 years	118	117	235
55 to 59 years	109	116	225
60 to 64 years	84	93	177
65 to 69 years	70	74	144
70 to 74 years	44	61	105
75 to 79 years	25	22	47
80 to 84 years	23	31	54
85 years and over	15	64	79
Total	2,185	2,321	4,506

Source: U.S. Census

Looking at potential changes in the age groups of Mount Vernon, in twenty years during the life of this plan, the largest adult age group will shift to the 55-69 group, marking a large shift into retirement age.

Despite the growing college enrollment, the population of Mount Vernon will begin to increase in age during the life of this plan. Services and programs the community offers may need to reflect the changing demographics. Services such as senior housing and wellness facilities should play a larger role in the future development of the community.

However, during the life of this plan, more families are expected to continue to move into the community, along with the college enrollment growth, creating a young, vibrant, growing city. Mount Vernon's relatively younger demographics are another reason to suggest population increases are likely during the next twenty years.

Profile and Analysis

Population Findings

- Steady population increases since 2000. Accounting for the census error in 2000, Mount Vernon has grown over 16% between 2000 and 2010.
- Median age in 2010 is significantly younger than the state of Iowa even without the college population.
- Median age is anticipated to increase slightly as the largest adult age cohorts begin to shift near retirement age by the end of the life of this plan.
- The city's population increase since 2000 is still higher than the average in the ECICOG region (8 percent). Mount Vernon was one of several communities experiencing substantial growth (double and triple digit percentage growth rates) during this time.
- The population is expected to be over 5,100 residents when the next census (2020) is released and could easily eclipse that figure should Cornell realize its planned student enrollment increase.
- Mount Vernon should prepare for an estimated population of near 6,000 residents by the year 2030 or the equivalent of approximately 1,500 new residents between 2010 and 2030. Housing, infrastructure and land use needs throughout the plan will be based on this projection.

Profile and Analysis

Housing Analysis

In addition to examining population trends and demographics, a look into the city's current and future housing needs must be taken in order to establish growth management strategies for the planning area. Housing development is crucial to a growing community, with implications in land use and infrastructure decisions, housing trends should be studied to establish adequate growth areas in and around the community.

According to the Census, the number of housing units in 2010 stood at 1,397. Since the 2010 Census, as of October 2013, there have been 18 new houses built, bringing the total number of units, according to the city, to 1,415. Taking the student population (1,197 in 2010) out of the projected population increase, the city's non-student population in 2030 would be approximately 4,376 residents. In development terms, the projected non-student population increase (at the 15% growth rate per census and 2.4 people per housing unit) is equivalent to 426 new non-student housing units between the year 2010 and 2030. This represents an average annual construction rate of just over 21 new units per year. For comparison, since 2010, the city has been averaging 4 new units a year.

At the current allowable density of approximately 3 units per acre, the new units would require approximately 142 acres of land (this does not account for the rights-of-way for streets and other utilities). As a general rule, 10 percent of developed land is consumed by rights-of-way. This makes an additional 14 acres of land to be used for streets and other utilities to serve the projected residential needs. All told, it is projected that approximately 156 acres of land will be needed to account for new non-student residential development in Mount Vernon over the next twenty years (see the Land Use Chapter of this plan for further explanation of this total as well as land use needs for park, commercial and industrial land uses).

Profile and Analysis

Building Permits Issued

2010:	5
2011:	13
2012:	0
2013:	0

Source: City of Mount Vernon

Building Permit Data

The housing permit data supplied by the City of Mount Vernon shows that only 18 homes have been built since 2010, or an average rate of 4 per year. A 15% growth rate suggests that the average number of non-student units built per year would be approximately twenty-one.

Although the recent building permit data suggests otherwise, the city may still make the 15% growth rate. A single development – in this case Stonebrook, could make up the shortfall rather easily. There could be dozens of housing units in the next addition of the Stonebrook development. In addition, Cornell College’s planned growth will also positively impact the city’s growth rate.

Housing Data

By 2000, the Census showed 1,199 housing units in Mount Vernon. The 2010 Census data shows a population of 4,506 people and 1,397 housing units in Mount Vernon, or over a 16% increase in housing units from 2000. This is consistent with the 16.4% population growth during this time. According to the Census, the 2010 vacancy rate in the city was 3.2% compared to 5.3% in 2000.

Vacancy rates between 3 and 6% are considered healthy for a community as it allows for flexibility for area homeowners as well as an ability for the city to handle sudden population increases.

Profile and Analysis

Housing Data

In 2000, the Census showed the average household size was 2.6 people per housing unit. That number slightly decreased in 2010 to 2.5. Generally, this number has been decreasing throughout the region as families are trending smaller due to the aging population. The average household size is expected to continue to drop across the region. However, based on Mount Vernon's significantly younger population – perhaps denoting families with more children, therefore more people per household – it is still expected to drop, but at a much slower rate than the rest of the region. Mount Vernon should have approximately 2.4 people per housing unit by the year 2030.

Based on this figure and the population projection, Mount Vernon should plan on needing approximately 426 new housing units by 2030 to bring the overall total to nearly 1,825 units.

New Housing Development

When new housing development occurs, it should, wherever possible, occur as infill development within the existing city limits. As such, new development should be connected to the existing community through efficient transportation patterns and appropriate design. All too often, new development occurs on the outskirts of a community and has no viable connection to the existing town, thus creating wholly separate communities both physically and socially.

As infill possibilities are exhausted, development should then occur incrementally, or contiguous to existing development. This new development should be located within the future growth corridor as shown on the future land use plan. The future growth corridor should be easily served by infrastructure and also limit negative environmental or agricultural impacts. Growth of this nature will reduce capital outlay and maintenance costs to the city by allowing short, economical extensions of municipal infrastructure (sewer, water, street, sidewalk, etc.) which serve the new neighborhoods. Incremental housing growth will also save open land and areas better suited for agricultural or other use.

Profile and Analysis

In addition, Mount Vernon should ensure that appropriate recreational opportunities grow as new housing is developed. The number and location of neighborhood parks should keep pace with new construction. As new housing developments are planned, the city should ensure that common “green space” is included in each new neighborhood. Because recreation opportunities are a major influence on a family’s decision on where to live, expanded recreation opportunities should be a priority for Mount Vernon.

To encourage walkability, main connections to the city’s trail and sidewalk system and to the major commercial areas as well as to city access points should be required. Infill development should be encouraged to diminish the impact of sprawl and promote connectivity.

Recreation goals and the objectives to meet those goals will be discussed later in the plan. The infrastructure and land use implications of this population target and housing analysis will be discussed in chapters on Infrastructure and Land Use.

Profile and Analysis

Housing Findings

- Average household size in 2010 was 2.5. That number is expected to drop slightly by 2030 to 2.4.
- A 15% growth rate is equivalent to approximately 426 non-student new homes between 2010 and 2030 or approximately 21 per year.
- The number of new homes by 2030 would require approximately 156 acres of land.
- There were 1,397 housing units in Mount Vernon in 2010. Based on building permit data, as of October 2013, there have been 18 new housing units built in the city bringing the total number to approximately 1,415 housing units.
- In 2010, according to the Census, there were 44 vacant housing units in the city. This represents a vacancy rate of 3.2%. This rate is considered healthy for a community as it allows for flexibility for area homeowners as well as an ability for the city to handle sudden population increases.
- The city will require approximately 1,825 non-student housing units by 2030.



CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

Quality of Life

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Quality of Life

Quality of Life

A Timeless City

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 contribute to this special sense. The tree-lined streets of the Ash Park Historic District, Cornell College's landmark campus, porches filled with people on a summer evening, the ambiance of the Uptown District during the many festivals held along First Street. These features, and more, make Mount Vernon a living community with preservation of these characteristics vital to the community's livability.

Challenges

However, current influences in and around Mount Vernon are creating changes that affect these traditional qualities. One challenge facing the community is growth. Population increases over the years have created pressures on the city's infrastructure and traditional neighborhood design. The natural decentralization of populations, along with contemporary subdivision patterns, have placed significant pressure on Mount Vernon's highly desirable traditional community environment.

In addition, business patterns which place an emphasis on the automobile and large parking lots, have also become a challenge to Mount Vernon's desire to maintain a strong traditional, walkable town center. The proposed Highway 30 bypass, while presenting the community with significant economic opportunities, will also present a development area with a scale and design that is different from the character of traditional Mount Vernon. This could present challenges with integrating new economic development opportunities with maintaining the city's traditional Uptown District.

Quality of Life

The city's environmental stewardship also faces challenges. City policies and daily practices related to energy use, pesticide application, street projects and many others can all negatively impact the local environment. The city should foster a systematic review of the environmental impacts to its soil, water, air, plants and urban wildlife and establish sustainable best practices, of which many are addressed throughout this plan.

As a result of the population increases, new business patterns and impacts on the local environment, the quality of life that makes Mount Vernon distinctive and draws people to it can be degraded. As such, Mount Vernon should encourage growth within the context of a traditional community. By understanding the patterns and relationships that make Mount Vernon beautiful, the town can develop policies for new growth and investment that reinforce the community's unique quality of life. As a result, Mount Vernon can take the challenges and accommodate new growth and use it to improve the community's livability.



Cornell Campus, City of Mount Vernon

Quality of Life

Mount Vernon's Livability

The crucial element in any plan is ensuring that the wishes and hopes the residents hold for their community is represented in the content of the plan. If the plan does not accurately reflect the needs and desires of area residents, it will have little value. Therefore, the City of Mount Vernon held a town meeting to attract public input. The meeting was held on a Saturday morning (in place of the Mayor's regularly scheduled "Big Picture" forum), on November 9, 2013.

The meeting was an interactive planning session with 36 residents taking part to begin to identify a future vision for the community. The session involved breaking into small groups identifying and prioritizing positive qualities that need to be maintained, as well as future concerns or challenges that need to be addressed. This exercise was held at the beginning of the planning process for two reasons:

- The critical elements for the future vision of the community are identified early in the process ensuring that appropriate problem identification occurs at the very beginning;
- Public participation is crucial for creating an effective and appropriate plan. By having a town meeting at the beginning of the process, every resident has an opportunity to direct the future vision for the planning area.

Quality of Life

The following is a list of the key attributes, in order, as ranked by the citizens present at the Town Hall meeting.

- Historic character
- Vibrant retail/uptown
- Cultural opportunities
- Quality education
- Active citizenry
- Safe/friendly/quiet/polite small-town nature
- Parks and recreation
- Amenities/services
- Aesthetics
- Well-defined zoning
- Walkable

The above list perfectly describes Mount Vernon's unique character. In addition to the Town Hall meeting, interviews were held with high school and middle school students, the elderly, leaders in the arts, the faith community, as well as Cornell College leadership and students. These interviews outlined key assets of Mount Vernon which mirror the above list.

- Quality Uptown District
- Walkability of the city
- Arts
- Amenities and services
- Recreational opportunities
- Traditional development patterns
- Location in the Cedar Rapids / Iowa City Corridor
- Being a college town

Quality of Life

Quality of Life Recommendations

These meetings and interviews helped define patterns and features that make the quality of life in Mount Vernon distinctive. It also addressed challenges that the city faces that can affect that quality of life. Without control, typical contemporary development patterns can substantially change the community's character. Yet, it is critically important for a city to grow and prosper. This leads to questions such as:

- Should Mount Vernon encourage or prevent growth?
- If Mount Vernon should encourage growth, where should it grow?
- What impact will these decisions have on the economic strength of Mount Vernon and its ability to support necessary public services?

As mentioned, the basic premise of the Mount Vernon Plan is that the community must grow, but that growth should maintain and enhance the special character of the traditional community. If the town does not take advantage of its growth potential, it faces economic stagnation which would endanger the quality of life that residents value. Left unmanaged, however, conventional growth would cause a loss of those qualities that make the community distinctive. The following pages outline specific goals to assist Mount Vernon in preserving its special character. These goals are developed more thoroughly throughout the plan.



A sidewalk juggler during a recent Chalk the Walk festival.

Quality of Life

Preservation of Historic Mount Vernon. The city's historic built environment must be maintained and preserved. Mount Vernon should increase protection of the historic buildings in the community by ensuring new development is consistent with the traditional town character and discouraging land uses which threaten the value of historic neighborhoods. The city should make steps to encourage the rehabilitation and restoration of historic structures and increase awareness and appreciation of the architectural and historic importance of buildings in the community.

Traditional Neighborhood Patterns. Where appropriate, new developments in Mount Vernon should follow the patterns of traditional neighborhoods (narrower rights-of-ways and setbacks, porches, mixed uses). Opportunities exist throughout the community for conventional residential development. However, where appropriate, new residential growth in Mount Vernon should be consistent with the development patterns of the traditional community. This offers new residents a distinctive alternative which emphasizes the best that Mount Vernon has to offer. Traditional patterns include continuous street networks that link neighborhoods together; integrating parks into neighborhood designs; mixing uses and housing types; encouraging building elements such as front porches and scaling development for widths and setbacks that are consistent with the traditional community.

Transportation that Reinforces Character. The City's transportation system should reinforce overall development objectives. Mount Vernon's transportation system should provide safe access to activity centers for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as motorists. It should provide strong connections between established and developing parts of the community and reinforce the patterns, scale and land use characteristics of the traditional town.

Quality of Life

The Green Network. Mount Vernon should continue to use public spaces as major design elements of the community. These spaces help contribute to its character as a walkable community as well as providing important active and passive recreational opportunities. A green network that connects activity centers, neighborhoods, and other open spaces through a continuous system of trails and environmental corridors will provide for the recreational needs of future residents well into the future.

Preservation of the Uptown District. Uptown Mount Vernon should continue as the city's unique shopping and entertainment district. The town center is a unique district which serves several different markets – local residents, tourists and the Cornell community – with a variety of specialty shops and restaurants. The district is also the civic and financial focus of town. Its economic vitality is recognized by the district's listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Development of the Highway 30 Bypass. Mount Vernon should take advantage of the bypass area by encouraging development that adds positive value to the community without negatively affecting the Uptown District. The city should manage development of new commercial sites to complement existing businesses. Focus should be on commercial development that cannot be accommodated within established business districts, such as the creation of a new employment center based on office and research uses. In addition, care should be taken on the development of supporting streets and open spaces which serve the new development area. These streets and open spaces should be linked into the structure of the traditional community.

Quality of Life

The Healthy City. Many aspects contribute to a healthy, vibrant city. Spiritual, mental and physical health all play an important role in the quality of life for any community. Mount Vernon should continue to maintain the atmosphere in which these features are nurtured and cultivated. In so doing, Mount Vernon creates a well rounded place to call home. As an example, expanded trails and park spaces support the health of the body, while education, cultural facilities and places of faith support intellectual and spiritual development of the mind.

Promote Sustainable Development. Mount Vernon should be a leader in sustainable development efforts. As mentioned throughout this plan, the city should promote low-impact development and green conservation standards including the use of renewable energy options. Examples include but are not limited to: residential solar and wind energy and a rain barrel program. Efficient transportation patterns, green building practices and mixed-use, walkable developments all lead to increased sustainability and an increased quality of life for area residents.



A Mount Vernon neighborhood. Photo by Dee Ann Rexroat



CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

Housing

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Housing

Housing

Housing in Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon is a mid-sized, stand-alone city located on two major highways (Highway 30 runs east and west and Highway 1 runs north and south). The community sits approximately 20 miles from the two large metropolitan areas of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. Mount Vernon, which shares its border with the smaller community of Lisbon, offers numerous employment opportunities, a viable Uptown District that includes shopping, entertainment and restaurants. In addition, Cornell College, an excellent and vibrant private liberal arts college, increases the appeal of living in Mount Vernon.

Earlier, using Census data, the plan detailed Mount Vernon's population demographics and undertook a housing analysis (page 16 – 33). That data suggests the community's population will continue to increase. This increase in population will bring with it a variety of housing challenges to the community such as finding available land for new construction; willing developers and landowners; upgraded infrastructure and other city services; and the need for appropriate housing to accommodate a wide variety of family types, income levels and ages.



The Garner President's House on the Cornell Campus – photo courtesy of Cornell College

Housing

A Variety of Housing Types

As Mount Vernon grows, it should continue to integrate a variety of housing types in new growth areas. Land development regulations should provide adequate flexibility to accommodate innovative designs within traditional town patterns. Mount Vernon should encourage local developers to utilize a variety of development approaches, some of which are already allowed in Mount Vernon:

Planned Unit Developments – an area specified by ordinance to be planned and developed as a single entity containing residential clusters, mixed-uses, quasi-public open spaces or a mix of all to achieve desired densities and offer unique design opportunities not possible under conventional zoning.

Cluster Subdivisions – a form of residential development that permits a reduction in lot area and bulk requirements, provided the overall density remains the same as a conventional subdivision. The remaining land area would then be set aside for common open space or preservation of environmentally sensitive features.

Traditional Neighborhood Design – this design approach includes more compact development, smaller lot sizes, shorter front yard setbacks, garages located in the rear of the property and porches in the front yard to encourage neighbor interaction. This design approach is consistent with much of the existing residential development in the historic portions of Mount Vernon.

Housing

In addition to utilizing the above development approaches, developers should be encouraged to offer a variety of housing types. Cities traditionally focus on single-family detached housing units. While these units are important to provide residents with flexibility in housing options, there are many other housing types available to meet Mount Vernon's growing needs, including:

Townhomes / Condos – these are two or more attached units which can be developed as owner-occupied or rental units. They provide construction and land use efficiencies while maintaining a sense of a single-family neighborhood.

Multi-Family Developments – these should be integrated into the structure of new neighborhoods, rather than developed on peripheral sites or used as buffering between lower and higher density developments. Design standards can provide a residential scale without creating a conventional apartment look.



Housing

Housing Commission

Mount Vernon should consider the creation of a Housing Commission, organized to address current housing needs in the community. The housing commission would represent a broad base of private and public interests with a priority to develop appropriate housing types for a wide range of income levels, ages and needs.

The commission, appointed by the city council and made up of qualified, local stakeholders, would act as a conduit for channeling local and external funding and other assistance to promote private development of appropriate housing types. Other duties of the commission may include developing programs to assist with qualified homebuyers and homeowners, both for rehabilitation or first time purchasing. These programs should be designed to lower the costs of monthly payments, ultimately making housing more affordable. Funding for these projects and programs could come from federal and state grants along with the regional housing trust fund.

Incentives

Mount Vernon should use the tools available to the community for promoting new development as well as rehabilitating existing housing. As land development has been relatively stagnant for the last several years, the city should find ways to incentivize land acquisition and infrastructure extensions for housing development. Potential financing tools include: Tax Increment Financing; Tax Abatement; Sale of Bonds; Grant Programs, Housing Trust Funds; Direct Public financing.

In addition, the city needs to work with professional consultants to ensure landowners and developers work together for the best interests of the city.

Housing

Housing Development

There is a strong sense of community pride in the beauty and history of Mount Vernon. The traditional residential areas of Mount Vernon contain numerous well-maintained and beautiful turn of the 20th century historic homes. Within these traditional residential areas, there are fewer than 5 vacant lots available for in-fill development. The new residential housing development areas are to the west (Stonebrook Addition), northeast (Wolfe Addition) and southeast (Oak Ridge Addition) which all contain newer homes with contemporary architecture.

Homes that may be considered appropriate housing for all income and age levels are scattered among the existing homes in the traditional residential area and the Colonial Estates Mobile Home Court located north on Highway 1. The few options for senior housing are located on Highway 30 - Cherry Ridge Assisted Living which has 12 units and Chapel View Manor which provides low-income housing for 21 residences.

Much of Mount Vernon's future residential growth will be located in four growth centers as shown on the Future Land Use Map (west, northeast, north and southeast growth areas). To ensure new development fits into the fabric of Mount Vernon's traditional neighborhoods, developers should be encouraged to follow these design patterns:

Continuous Street Grids – maintains street continuity and convenient access through new neighborhoods by avoiding cul-de-sacs. These street grids should maintain proportions and dimensions that are consistent with traditional neighborhood street patterns.

Street and Setback Ratios – street widths and setbacks should be consistent with traditional neighborhood patterns. Defining features include relatively narrow street channels, room for larger overstory street trees along a greenway strip, comfortable sidewalks.

Housing

Organized Around Neighborhood Parks – each new development should have a small, public open space that is a focus for the neighborhood and designed for all the residents in the immediate district. Each neighborhood park should then be linked to the community’s park system by trails or clearly marked roads or sidewalks.

Links to Town – new development should be connected to the established town by boulevards. Strong connections between new neighborhoods and the established town are important to assure continued growth as a unified community. This design concept recommends strengthening these links by creating features such as landscaped medians, ornamental lighting, street furniture and should act as a linear park, leading people between the existing and new parts of the community.

Front Porches – Mount Vernon should continue its traditional pattern of front porch design in new developments. Front porches are an important part of the community as both an architectural element and community theme. They provide opportunities for social interaction between neighbors and offer a unique design option for homes. The city should encourage developers to design new subdivisions with the front porch in mind

The following pages contain a listing of housing recommendations for the city of Mount Vernon.



Housing

Housing Recommendations

1. Ensure there is enough available land for new housing development.
2. Integrate appropriate housing for families of all income and age levels.
3. Encourage a variety of housing types in new developments, including single- and multi-family, and townhomes and condos.
4. Utilize a variety of development approaches, including traditional neighborhood design, cluster design, front porches, neighborhood parks, strong links between new development and the existing town through trails and street grids.
5. Establish a Mount Vernon Housing Commission for the purpose of facilitating appropriate housing opportunities and researching the availability of private and public funding to encourage repair of existing homes and building of new homes.
6. Support the housing commission to assist with housing needs of the community.
7. Develop a housing rehabilitation program. Utilize grants, housing trust funds and general funds.
8. Utilize incentives to encourage housing development, such as TIF, tax abatements, grant programs, and direct public funding.
9. Work with Cornell College to accommodate the anticipated increase in enrollment to ensure student housing needs are met. This may include building more dormitories as well as finding off-campus housing options.
10. Encourage green building practices, including establishing standards for residential solar and wind energy.



CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

Economic Development

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Economic Development

Economic Development

Economic Development in Mount Vernon

As mentioned, Mount Vernon is at the junction of US Highway 30 and Iowa Highway 1. Highway 30, originally The Lincoln Highway, is the modern incarnation of the first trans-American roadway. The geographical proximity to both of these major modern highways allows quick access to Cedar Rapids and Iowa City for work and recreation, and a short drive from Midwestern cities: Chicago, Minneapolis, Des Moines, Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Madison. Mount Vernon is also minutes away from the Eastern Iowa Airport's access to the world.

While the population is modest, Mount Vernon has the amenities of a much larger city. A thriving arts community enriches residents year around. The city supports two business districts: the Uptown District, and the Highway 30 corridor. These two commercial centers are minutes from each other and offer a mix of service businesses, restaurants, and specialty shopping for local residents. Mount Vernon is a Main Street Community which opens potential funding resources for historic preservation, business education and development. The Highway 30 corridor also connects Mount Vernon and Lisbon. This commercial district is home to car dealerships, grocery stores, gas stations, health care services and other businesses.

Mount Vernon's historic districts include the entire Cornell College campus and surrounding residential areas, an area in the northwest quadrant (called the Ash Park District) and most of the uptown commercial structures.



Mount Vernon's historic Uptown District

Economic Development

Development in Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon has maintained its distinct character by guiding growth through the years. Mount Vernon's zoning ordinance prohibits placement of large retail stores within city limits, allowing locally-owned businesses to thrive. While there is room for business growth in the Uptown District, most future commercial growth is projected near the proposed Highway 30 bypass south of town along Highway 1 or along the "Urban Corridor" located along Highway 1 between the Uptown District and Highway 30.

In 2007, Mount Vernon was designated a Main Street Iowa community. The structure of the Main Street Committee working with business owners, property owners, citizens and city government has enabled Mount Vernon to become a tourist and event destination bringing over 20,000 visitors to the community annually. The designation has also spurred over \$8 million of private investment in building rehabilitation and renovation within the Uptown District.

In 2010, Mount Vernon developed a Streetscape and gateway entrance plan that includes upgrades to the Uptown District. This plan would improve parking along main street, upgrade sidewalks, provide a cohesive signature look for the main street area and provide for easier pedestrian access. The city and the private property owners have also been active in improving the appearance of historic uptown business properties.

In 2014, Cornell College announced a strategic plan that includes updating of facilities and the goal of increasing the student population by 43% (total population of 1,600 students) over the next 10 years. In order to achieve this goal, additional full time faculty and staff will be needed, which, will require additional housing, services, and amenities for Mount Vernon.

Economic Development

Competitive Analysis

Mount Vernon is fortunate to be a destination city because of its many unique retail stores and frequent festivals. This gives the community a competitive edge and vitality over surrounding cities. Mount Vernon has key area anchor retailers in grocery, automotive, pharmacy, lumber and a variety of professional services

Most nearby small towns struggle to maintain a business district that would attract either visitors or local residents to shop. This allows Mount Vernon businesses to draw people from surrounding towns to shop and enjoy the community.

Recommendations

Economic development and community viability/vitality are inextricably linked. Because of the complexity of economic development and the many vested interests, it is recommended that professionals be retained to partner with the existing community structure to aid in defining and supporting Mount Vernon's economic plan. The community group should consist of, but not be limited to, the City Administrator, City Council representatives, Mount Vernon Lisbon Community Development Group representatives, Cornell representative, Land Owners, Developers, key business owners and other community leaders.

A well-defined, consistent, cohesive, long-term economic development plan is essential. A partner in this process could be a regional economic development group, such as the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance. Mount Vernon is currently included in the Alliance's marketing, and that group could become a strong partner in Mount Vernon's economic future. Economic development must be an ongoing investment, much like street repair, water, waste disposal, and public safety. The City Council should allocate annual funding for economic development. The City Council must also actively monitor and address performance benchmarks for the economic team established to advance Mount Vernon's economic growth.

Economic Development

As the need for economic growth in the Highway 30 corridor and the bypass surrounding area emerges, care must be given to protecting the Uptown District as a traditional magnet for attracting business and visitors. This may include continuation of restrictive zoning regarding types of business. These restrictions may be expanded to address physical size of buildings, appearance in design consistent with uptown standards, lighting, materials and similar ambiance.

Mount Vernon's economic vitality depends upon the community's attraction of consumers. This is a complex intersection of product/service variety, pricing and business hours. A recent marketing survey indicates that people are attracted to Mount Vernon based on historic preservation attributes, small-town friendliness, customer service, Cornell College, and existing mix of product and services. The same survey indicates a desire to update the uptown streetscape and parking, address walkability, and increase variety and shop hours. An updated economic plan needs to address retaining, maintaining, and enhancing what is currently available in Mount Vernon while simultaneously embracing new opportunities.

Economic development is essential to diversify and increase the tax base, to provide opportunities for local employment, and to incorporate contemporary green development trends for local shops and services. Therefore, any economic development plan should contain realistic goals that correlate with housing, infrastructure, land use and quality of life plans.



Mount Vernon Visitor's Center



CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

Transportation and Infrastructure

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Transportation and
Infrastructure

Transportation and Infrastructure

Transportation and Infrastructure

Meeting the significant needs for capital improvements requires an investment in the town by Mount Vernon's residents, businesses, and to some extent by the state and federal governments. Citizens will support such investments if the city can demonstrate their necessity and ensure their cost efficiency. Projects that obtain the broadest community support will be those which fulfill strategic improvement objectives that help implement the vision of the future embodied in this plan.

The Mount Vernon water treatment plant has adequate capacity to handle the anticipated development to the west and south of town. However, it is likely that a new pump station would eventually be required in that area in order to pump the effluent to the plant. Storm water lines will also be needed as development occurs. Should growth occur on the north side of town, water and sewer services would need to go under the railroad tracks.

The city should consider long-term conservation efforts to reduce the amount of storm water in the sewers thereby lengthening the life of the water treatment plant. Examples of these conservation practices include rain barrels, rain gardens, and bioswales. Rain gardens can be utilized both by residents and the city to temporarily collect storm water before natural infiltration. On streets without curbs, or with curb cuts, rain gardens can be strategically placed to collect storm water. Sites like these are much more financially feasible than pavement correction in areas where water otherwise sits on the road. With a curb cut water can be diverted to a depressed area for infiltration.

The Silurian aquifer, and to some extent, the Jordan aquifer, provide adequate well water for the city now and will do so in the foreseeable future, but wells do eventually stop producing. It is likely that the city will need to drill another well sometime in the next 20 years. Mount Vernon has several old water and sewer lines that will need to be replaced during the time span covered by this plan. The city should be mindful of future water use as its population increases. The region's aquifers, specifically the Jordan, are drawing down and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will be enforcing new rules for cities to manage their water use.

Transportation and Infrastructure

As the city grows to the west and south, new streets will need to be added. A north-south arterial street on the west side has been a part of city planning for several years and is included in the West Side Long Range Transportation Plan prepared for the city by Shive-Hattery in 2007. No such plan exists for the area between Highway 30 and the bypass. When the bypass goes in, this will be a prime area for development, and the city will need to have a street plan ready for that development.

As older streets in town need repairs and resurfacing, the street footprint should be preserved if at all possible because the width of the street and the trees lining it add considerably to the ambiance of the community. The city also needs to develop truck routes through town. Establishing defined truck routes will alleviate congestion, reduce damage to streets, and promote the safety of vehicular traffic in the city.

In addition to the transportation plan mentioned above, the City of Mount Vernon and the Community Development Group (CDG) partnered to sponsor a Streetscape Development Plan which was produced by Shoemaker & Haaland in 2010. The plan calls for the beautification of the uptown shopping area, including the alleys and the south parking lot. These enhancements would make uptown shopping a much more attractive and pleasurable experience.

Finally, in 2011 the City of Mount Vernon was one of 12 communities selected to participate in the Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program. The program provides professional planning and design assistance along transportation corridors for small Iowa communities with a population under 10,000. The Mount Vernon Visioning Committee worked with Trees Forever, faculty and staff from ISU, and design interns from ISU to produce a plan for Mount Vernon that focused on three items: 1) Trail Connectivity and Safety, 2) Integrated Signage, & 3) Unified Transportation System.

Transportation and Infrastructure

The implementation of these latter two plans would go a long way toward making Mount Vernon a more attractive place for current and new residents and businesses. It would also enhance the tourism trade that already comes to Mount Vernon, as described in the Economic Development chapter.

Parks and Recreation Infrastructure

Mount Vernon's park facilities are particularly important to the city's quality of life and overall infrastructure network. Therefore, the city should continue to establish a system of connected parks and trails to link new development and activity centers to the existing community. Any new park that is proposed in Mount Vernon should be linked to the network of open spaces throughout Mount Vernon.

The concept of a linked pedestrian system, connecting neighborhoods, parks, schools, and Uptown would create a unified community. The trails network could include on-street bikeways, trails through parks and school grounds as well as clearly marked sidewalks. As mentioned in the Housing chapter, new development should be organized around a neighborhood park and then linked to the established town by boulevards and other trail links as appropriate.

In addition, interurban links should be explored to enhance the region's recreational opportunities. Mount Vernon's trail system and open space network should be connected to a growing regional trail system. There are opportunities for connections to both Lisbon and Cedar Rapids. A Lisbon greenway could be developed along the right-of-way of the former Iowa Electric Light and Power interurban which would complement Lisbon's trail system. A new trail for this corridor should be developed with property owners and designed to address any security and privacy concerns. Mount Vernon should also work with the State and Cedar Rapids toward development of a Cedar Rapids connection utilizing Mount Vernon Road westward. This trail corridor could provide access to the Abbe Creek School as well as regional parks and provide an alternate route to Cedar Rapids' east side.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Sidewalks

A complete sidewalk system contributes to the ease of walking, safety and daily interaction among neighbors – a hallmark quality of life in Mount Vernon. During the planning period, the city should strive to complete a sidewalk system which encompasses the entire community, with improved pedestrian connections to schools, parks, Uptown and other activity generators.

The sidewalk program should start with all new subdivisions being required to have a system which can be extended with any future development. Over time, the city should work with property owners and extend the system throughout any area of town currently unserved by sidewalks or in areas where the sidewalks are in disrepair. Then, focus the program on connecting activity centers and existing trails to complete the community-wide sidewalk / trail system.

Sidewalk recommendations:

Require sidewalks in all new developments.

Meet all ADA requirements in sidewalk construction.

Undertake a sidewalk installation and improvement program which encompasses the entire community.

Focus new sidewalks in areas connecting activity centers and existing trails.

Bring existing sidewalks which are in disrepair up to code.

Connect newly developing and outlying areas to existing traditional neighborhoods.

Ensure appropriate street lighting when updating the city's sidewalk system.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Transportation and Infrastructure Recommendations

There are seven major recommendations that should guide the future of public infrastructure in Mount Vernon.

1. Provide for the safe movement of all residents of Mount Vernon.

The transportation system should provide for safe movement. Roads and intersections should be designed to promote the orderly flow of traffic. The system should be easily understood and clearly identified for visitors. It is also important to realize that not all people travelling in Mount Vernon are using motorized vehicles. People may be walking or bicycling, especially in areas near schools, parks, and neighborhoods with young families. The city should also be safe for pedestrians or cyclists who must cross busy intersections, arterial streets, or railroad tracks. This includes ensuring appropriate street lighting for the safe movement of pedestrians. The Trail Connectivity and Safety Plan should be implemented by the city.

2. Provide water and sewer systems that meet both the needs of the citizens of Mount Vernon and environmental quality standards.

Residents in Mount Vernon expect good performance from their water, sewer, and drainage systems. Clean, high quality water and pollution control are important issues. As the city grows, these services should be extended to new areas in an efficient and timely manner. The city should provide updated cost estimates for completion of plans that have been developed, as well as updated cost estimates for infrastructure costs in anticipated new development areas of the city.

The city should also utilize green conservation efforts to mitigate water infiltrating into the sewer system. In addition, Mount Vernon must manage water use as its population increases.

Transportation and Infrastructure

3. Improve and extend streets, sidewalks, and trails in a manner that supports desirable development patterns.

New streets, sidewalks, and trails and improvements to the same should be made in a manner that reinforces the policies of this plan. Priority should be given to those projects which provide solutions to existing problems. Furthermore, the city should anticipate its growth and make necessary improvements that will encourage development in areas that provide the greatest benefit to the city. The Westside Transportation Plan should be accepted as the footprint for street development on the west side of the City. The city should commit to similar plans for the north side of the city and for the area south of present Highway 30.

Where possible, the city should promote the use of permeable paving in new roadways, parking areas and trails. This green conservation effort is another sustainable development tool to help mitigate storm water run-off and extend the life of the city's infrastructure.

4. Rehabilitate aging infrastructure to maintain the quality service levels expected by the citizens of Mount Vernon.

Mount Vernon is a growing city with many areas that contain aging infrastructure. The city should develop a plan for the replacement of aging infrastructure components on a continual and timely basis. When updating aging infrastructure, the city must preserve the character of existing neighborhoods (i.e. preserve trees and original road dimensions, where possible).

Transportation and Infrastructure

5. Enhance the attractiveness of Mount Vernon to current and new residents, businesses and tourists by improving the appearance of our infrastructure.

Infrastructure is often thought of merely in terms of “bricks and mortar,” but it can be much more. With a little effort Mount Vernon can be made much more attractive than it already is. Beautification can be a major component of any economic development plan. The streetscape plan for downtown Mount Vernon should be adopted so there is a timeline to achieve this goal. Additional planning is encouraged for development of the gateways to the city.

6. Undertake a sidewalk installation and improvement program which encompasses the entire community.

Sidewalks provide for the safe movement of pedestrians. It should be the city’s goal to encompass the entire community with improved pedestrian connections to schools, parks, Uptown and other activity centers. The city should connect newly developing and outlying areas to existing traditional neighborhoods as well as bringing existing sidewalks which are in disrepair up to code. This includes ensuring appropriate street lighting for the safe movement of pedestrians.

7. Implement the three accepted transportation related plans.

The Mount Vernon City Council has accepted three transportation related plans in recent years: the 2007 West Side Transportation Plan, the 2010 Streetscape Development Plan and the 2011 Living Roadways Community Visioning Plan. Significant work, public input and study have been invested in these documents. It is important for the city to follow through and implement these existing plans in order to help achieve the vision established in this plan.



CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

City Facilities

Quality Public Services – 65

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City Facilities

City Facilities

Quality Public Services

Mount Vernon enjoys a wealth of government/public facilities that support and enhance the life of the community. Although some of these facilities are often taken for granted and go unnoticed, they are central to the overall functioning of the community and act as a web of support or safety net for life in this community. These facilities include such things as city hall, law enforcement and fire protection, libraries, educational institutions, and other public-oriented facilities. As Mount Vernon looks to the future, both near and far, the city should pay special heed to these services to assure that they continue to function effectively and that they move along with the changing needs brought about by developments that are part of the life of any community. The following is a summary of the critical public services in Mount Vernon.

City Hall

The City moved into its City Hall on the west end of Uptown in March of 1989. It currently houses city administrative offices (Mayor, City Manager, Assistant City Manager, and city staff) and the Police Department on the main level. There is also a community conference room on this level. The city water works department is on the lower level of the building. This lower level also houses the Council Chambers and the American Legion room. The City Engineer, Parks and Recreation Director, and Public works (streets and sewer) are located in buildings elsewhere in the city.

At the present time the building still meets the needs of city staff although there is some sense that some of the offices scattered in other parts of the city might be better located in City Hall. The City Engineer and Parks and Recreation Director are possible residents. The potential move of the Police Department out of this building (discussed below) would allow for expansion of City Hall without additional building expense.

City Facilities

Police Department

The Police Department has outgrown their small part of City Hall and probably needs to move in the near future. They are currently cramped for space for both personnel and equipment. The department currently has equipment and evidence stored in two other locations, an inconvenient and perhaps unsafe situation. There is no indoor parking for police vehicles, a situation that requires sensitive electronics (computers, batteries, etc.) to be removed from cars and taken inside for storage during severe heat and cold).

The Police Department has proposed a move to the old Fire Station immediately to the west of City Hall. This would potentially solve some of their current space problems and could be done with a relatively small investment on the part of the city. However, the department would still have to keep some of its equipment at another location.

A longer term focus is to relocate the Police Department to a new Law Enforcement Center, probably on the south edge of town. The Highway 30 bypass, now being developed, will move most of their operations to the south, with increased patrol responsibilities along the new Highway 30 Corridor. Also, since development will most likely take place to the south and west, this relocation would have many advantages for the city. In keeping with the goals stated above, this new Law Enforcement Center would best be done in collaboration with the Lisbon Police Department and, possibly, the Linn County Sheriff's Department.

The possible expansion of the Police Department to an enlarged facility on the south side of town represents a prime example of the city's need for a proactive approach to city facilities. As development moves to the South, and available land is bought for new development, the city needs to be a part of that land distribution. If it is not active in its pursuit of land necessary for public facility development, it will be put in a position where the efficient and effective development of facilities is cut off.

City Facilities

Fire Department

The Mount Vernon Fire Department moved into a new facility on Palisades Road near Highway 30 on the south side of Mount Vernon in the fall of 2013. This is a facility designed with the help of the Fire Department and meets their current and near future needs. There is adequate land available for expansion; the building is designed and sited with possible expansion in mind. The move to the new facility opened up the old Fire Station for the possible expansion of the Police Department discussed above. This adaptive reuse of the station is the kind of efficient and effective facilities planning the city should strive to meet when addressing facility needs.

Ambulance Garage

The Mount Vernon/Lisbon ambulance service, owned and operated jointly by both communities, has undergone some recent changes in organizational structure and personnel, slowly moving from a provisional paramedic squad (no full-time paramedic on duty) to a paramedic service (full-time paramedic on duty). There is a movement to a more full-time staff, beginning with the recent hiring of an Emergency Medical Director. Other full-time staff may be added in the future, adding to the continuing volunteer crews. However, these organizational changes will not require any facilities changes.

The current Ambulance garage, located just off Highway 30 at the southeast corner of Mount Vernon and serving both Lisbon and Mount Vernon, has been enlarged recently. It now contains an office, a sitting room, two bedrooms, and a two-bay parking area for the service's two ambulances. These facilities are sufficient for the extended future since there are no plans to add another ambulance and crew; this ambulance service has mutual assistance agreements with other ambulance services in the area and can also be aided by Linn County Rescue 57. The current location is also quite appropriate for access to both towns and the surrounding area, although waits are sometimes necessary for the ambulances to enter Highway 30. With the new bypass, the current location will become even better because the waits to access then old Highway 30 will be eliminated.

City Facilities

City Maintenance Facility

Located just south of the railroad tracks on Highway 1 on the north side of town, the city maintenance facility houses necessary vehicles, equipment, and materials (sand, salt, etc.) for the continued maintenance of the cities properties. The land is currently being expanded, through filling, to the west of the existing buildings. These facilities are adequate for the foreseeable future with room for expansion.

Mount Vernon Community Library

Mount Vernon's Community Library is, through an agreement with Cornell College, currently housed in Cornell's Cole Library. There is an active Community Library Board that decides, in cooperation with the Cornell Library staff, the community library policies and strategies. The city pays an annual fee for general overhead and also pays the salary of a Community Librarian. This partnership is an excellent example of the cooperation and collaboration the city has as one of the goals for public facilities. Currently, the partnership is attractive for Mount Vernon, but as the community and the college move forward, the partnership may undergo some changes. First, it may be necessary for the community to pay the college additional money for general overhead in order to maintain or expand a level of service advantageous for the community. In addition, Cornell is now discussing a campus master plan that may/will include an expanded library. The city may be asked to contribute money to such an expansion. In order to continue with this unique sharing of facilities and materials, such a collaboration would be quite positive. This is, again, an area that would benefit from cooperation between the community and college in planning and funding.

In the short term, new signage and parking is needed for the community library. There are currently no signs directing community members to the library or to the community parking area adjacent to the library. In addition, there is some talk of creating satellite sites as the community grows and as these sites become more feasible because of digital/internet/cloud technology. Mount Vernon should investigate the availability of the ICN for these satellite sites and plan for a near-future upgrade for community access. This could be done now.

City Facilities

Community Center

For several years a new Community Center has been the topic of discussion and preliminary planning. Currently, Mount Vernon's need for a community center is met, to some extent, by the First Street Community Center located at the east end of the Uptown District and Cornell's Sports Center. These facilities are generously open for community events. The initiative for a new, modern, more extensive center began with a group of citizens investigating the possibility and feasibility of such a center. The discussion has grown to currently involve the city, the citizen group initiating the discussion for the center, Cornell College, and the Mount Vernon School District.

In a referendum the voters in Mount Vernon elected to earmark significant Local Option Sales Tax money to such a center. As planning has moved forward the center has begun to take shape -- the center could include exercise facilities including an indoor pool (see below), community meeting rooms, larger public use areas and other amenities to benefit the wellness of Mount Vernon residents. This collaborative planning and shared use are consistent with the goals set forth earlier in this section. The future of this center is somewhat uncertain at this time because of funding issues. However, it is clear that Mount Vernon is and will continue to be in need of such a modern and multi-functional facility open to community members, Mount Vernon public schools, and Cornell College.

Municipal Swimming Pool

Mount Vernon's municipal swimming pool, located in Davis Park on the north side of town, is currently a focus of some discussion. It is in need of substantial repairs/upgrades. However, these repairs/upgrades are currently part of a larger discussion going on in the community about a Community Center, described above. There is little question that many residents in Mount Vernon want a new municipal pool. In keeping with the goals for the development of public facilities, planning for such a pool, whether as part of the Community Center or as a seasonal, outdoor pool, should move forward in a collaborative manner, involving all constituents in a mutually advantageous manner.

City Facilities

Public Schools

As with most communities, Mount Vernon community schools are the responsibility of the School Board and the school administration. Central to the short and long-range planning of the school system is the core principle of sharing information and equipment/facilities with other stakeholders in this and adjacent communities. This is compatible with the stated goals for this section of the Comprehensive Plan. The Mount Vernon School District, Lisbon School District, Cornell College, and the community at large should be working together to create collaboratively planned, efficiently built, and cooperatively utilized facilities that will benefit all involved.

City Parks and Recreation

Mount Vernon is the home of twelve different parks and recreation spaces that are particularly important to the city's overall quality of life. In addition, there are beautiful wooded areas around the public schools and Cornell College which provide natural recreational opportunities. Public recreational facilities include an outdoor swimming pool, soccer and baseball fields, basketball courts, volleyball nets, playgrounds, picnic areas, historic structures like the Lincoln Highway bridge, a nature park around "the quarry," two Frisbee golf venues, a sledding hill right in the heart of town, a skate park, and the new Nancy Doreen Huffman dog park.

Those facilities are located within the existing city limits of Mount Vernon. Complementing the city park facilities include Palisades-Kepler State Park, located two miles west of the city. This park, sitting along bluffs on the Cedar River, contains nearly 200 acres of active and passive recreation opportunities ranging from camping, hiking, fishing, rock-climbing and boating. In addition, there is a private, nine-hole golf course within the city, as well.

City Facilities

City Parks and Recreation

Many of Mount Vernon's park facilities are in need of upgrades. Some upgrades, while critically important to the life of the respective park, are minor, such as new backstops, lights or concession stands. The city should consider the recommendations contained in the Mount Vernon Park Master Plan when addressing these park needs. However, there are major projects planned to enhance Mount Vernon's overall park system. Major upgrades to the community's park facilities include:

- ❖ Developing the west-side, multi-generational Stoner Park. Amenities of this park will include trails, playgrounds and active recreational opportunities.
- ❖ Establishing a pedestrian crossing at Highway 30 and 1st Street SE. This will connect the city's Nature Park with new development on the south side of Highway 30.
- ❖ Extending the trail system throughout the city.



Photo by Jay Johnson

City Facilities

United States Post Office

Although somewhat out of the purview of the Mount Vernon Plan but certainly not outside the central interests of this Plan, the United States Post Office is an important public facility. Currently the Post Office is centrally located on Second Street Southwest just one block off First Street, the main street of uptown Mount Vernon. It, like many other post offices, is a leased facility. The actual location of the Post Office is in the hands of the United States Postal Service, often decided in cooperation with local actors. In some communities the Post Office is being relocated to the edge of town (witness Solon, Iowa, just 9 miles south of Mount Vernon). Because of recent reorganization in the USPS, mail is now sorted in Marion and delivered to Mount Vernon ready for delivery. Because of this, the current Mount Vernon facility, while still adequate, is now a bit large for its required uses. It is also showing signs of its age -- it was built in the 1960s. The primary requirement for this or any other location is a loading dock accessible by small mail trucks.

The city should decide on the most advantageous future location for the post office and work with the USPS in relocating to that new location or enhancing it at its current location, if necessary. In recent years, several small town post offices have been closed. Mount Vernon should do what it can to keep this vital community resource.

City Facilities

Public Facilities Recommendations

There are four major recommendations that guide the future of public facilities in Mount Vernon.

1. Address the needs and demands of present and future development.

Design public services that address the needs and demands of present and future development through collaboration/coordination of major stakeholders. This will ensure a dynamic community driven by a synergy among the major players/contributors to a vibrant civic life.

In a small community with relatively limited resources it is essential that the major stakeholders work together to maximize the return on any planning efforts and expenditures rather than working alone and inadvertently duplicating facilities. In the area of public facilities it is important to collaborate so that resources are developed and used in an effective and efficient manner. It is also important to consider the strategic location of new facilities so that all stakeholders share easy access. To this end, the city should convene a group of stakeholders for an annual or semi-annual assessment/discussion of present and future facilities.

2. Maintain the high quality of public facilities Mount Vernon deserves.

Maintain the high quality of public facilities in the most efficient and effective way possible and seek the greatest possible efficiencies in the development and operation of facilities into the future.

Exercise regular assessments of public facilities and assure that they are operating and expanding in a way to most efficiently and effectively meet the needs of the community

City Facilities

3. Develop a long range facilities plan.

Develop a long range facilities plan, including a budget and timeframe designed to support Mount Vernon's development objectives and plans.

Look to the future with community stakeholders and create a plan consistent with expected growth numbers and directions. Develop long term strategic directions for public facilities and short term budgets and specific development plans. The facilities plan should promote, where appropriate, green building practices for all new community facilities, including alternative energy use (wind, solar, geothermal), water conservation efforts and low-impact development practices.

4. Utilize a pro-active approach to public facilities.

Follow a pro-active approach to public facilities; act now to allow for planned future development of public facilities.

The city must anticipate growth and demand for public facilities from within (growth of administrative staff, for instance) and without (expanded development or anticipated needs for schools, for instance) and act to have the pathway for meeting these needs/demands open. A proactive approach, anticipating actions years into the future and taking those actions in a timely way, will assure a consistent level of public facilities.



CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

Land Use and Development

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Land Use and
Development

Land Use

Introduction

This chapter of the plan is focused on land use, both existing and future, within and around the City of Mount Vernon. The intent is to provide a framework to guide and direct new development in the planning area. This should ensure that future development is consistent with the goals of the plan and paced in such a way as to not outstrip the city's ability to provide proper services.

The Land Use Plan is divided into two sections. The first describes useful tools for managing land use; the final section describes future policy directions in land use including the official Mount Vernon Future Land Use Map.

Land Use Tools

Zoning and subdivision ordinances are two common regulatory land use tools for cities and counties to enforce community standards. Ordinances of this nature enable the implementation and enforcement of the policies and provisions contained in a comprehensive plan.

In any growing region, development pressures are usually the strongest at the edge of an already developed area. When allowed to go unregulated, this development pressure often causes undesirable results. The city, however, can utilize this plan to logically identify where appropriate growth areas should be planned for and use zoning and subdivision ordinances to guarantee the sound development of the city. The Land Use Chapter of the Mount Vernon Plan will serve as a guide for future revisions of the city's development tools.

Land Use

Zoning Ordinance

Zoning is the most important tool to implement a comprehensive plan. This method works by regulating various aspects of how land may be used. Zoning's name is derived from dividing areas of a city into zones, or districts. Certain uses of land are permitted in each zone according to specific standards recommended by the planning and zoning commission and adopted by the City Council.

Mount Vernon has a zoning ordinance currently in place. After the Comprehensive Plan is adopted, the zoning ordinance should be thoroughly reviewed and updated to ensure the standards are working in conjunction with the goals and objectives contained in this plan. Specific issues the city should address in a zoning ordinance update include:

- ❖ Housing diversity options (i.e. housing types for all ages and incomes, 2nd floor housing, etc.)
- ❖ Low impact development / green conservation standards as discussed in the Transportation / Infrastructure Chapter, including renewable energy options and standards for residential solar and wind energy
- ❖ Review zoning map to ensure consistency with the plan (i.e. specific land uses in the bypass area such as appropriate retail commercial, parking in back, design standards, etc.)

Subdivision Ordinance

A subdivision ordinance is a tool the city uses to enforce standards so that land subdivision occurs in a beneficial manner. The platting requirements in the Mount Vernon subdivision ordinance specify the criteria for subdividing land throughout the community. Simply put, subdivision is a process in which land is legally described and is converted into building lots. It involves the division of a tract of land into smaller parcels and usually involves the creation of streets and other infrastructure improvements such as water and sewer systems, sidewalks, and street lighting. The subdivision ordinance is a very effective tool for enforcing growth policies. Like the zoning ordinance, Mount Vernon should review and update its subdivision ordinance to be consistent with the goals and objectives contained in this plan.

Land Use

Additional Planning Tools

In addition to the zoning and subdivision ordinances, the city has other options when planning for future growth. A fringe-area agreement with the county is another very important tool a city can use to coordinate growth management policies and manage future development. In addition, a growing city such as Mount Vernon should have annexation policies in place to facilitate the annexation process when the need arises. The following describe fringe-area agreements and the city's annexation policies.

Fringe-Area Agreements

With an adopted subdivision ordinance, a municipality has the right to review plats within two miles of its boundaries. A fringe-area agreement with the county is necessary if the city wants to coordinate its standards in the fringe area with the county. This would lead to cooperative planning for the sound development of the entire region.

Currently, Mount Vernon does not have a fringe-area agreement with Linn County. The city is in discussion with the county and the neighboring city of Lisbon to create an agreement. The new fringe-area agreement should be consistent with the maps, goals and objectives contained in this plan.

The city should ensure that municipal standards should be used when reviewing development proposals in the city's primary growth areas. For example, in any future urban growth areas outside of the city limits, it would be appropriate to allow city zoning and subdivision standards, as well as any municipal design standards to be used when reviewing proposed developments. Since it is very likely that future development in the city's growth area would eventually be annexed into Mount Vernon, the development should occur at city standards.

Land Use

Annexation

Cities generally annex land to provide areas for growth, or for a particular public benefit such as managing land development around the city. For example, the city may desire to annex land at major entrances into the community to manage and/or influence the type of land uses that may develop there. Annexation may also occur if a municipality desires to prepare the area for development. The annexation process generally occurs when it is in the public interest to maintain local management over a parcel or tract of land. Annexation may be achieved voluntarily or involuntarily (with or without the explicit consent or request of the land owner).

Annexation for the City of Mount Vernon will likely be needed during the life of this plan due to the projected growth. When considering annexation, the city must be able to pay for the services required by the residents in the new territory. Because residential land does not necessarily “pay for itself,” meaning the money received through property taxes may not be enough to pay for the services required, the fiscal context of annexation should be carefully examined. Services may include sewer, water, snow removal, road maintenance, police, and fire protection, garbage removal, and other costs generally associated with city services.

The benefits of properly planned annexation include coherence and efficiency in the development of a community. Through orderly planned annexation, growth would then be encouraged in areas where services could be most readily extended, therefore minimizing costs.

In addition, proper public input from citizens of the city and the areas to be annexed must be sought. The city should establish an annexation committee to foster communication with landowners located within the growth areas. This committee would work with neighboring property owners to ensure that the owner’s plans for the property are being met and that voluntary annexation will occur within the scope of the comprehensive plan.

Land Use

The following are general policies of Mount Vernon with respect to annexation:

- ❖ To gather proper public input and seek the use of voluntary annexations.
- ❖ To annex areas of land within the designated Growth Areas and within the designated annexation priority areas.
- ❖ To annex areas where it is clearly desirable to square out boundaries for the purpose of greater efficiency or economy in providing municipal services.
- ❖ To annex areas where annexation is determined to be in the best interest of the city and the owners of the annexed property.
- ❖ To consider topography, water and drainage conditions, current land use, cost to city, and other features such as prime agricultural land when annexation is proposed.

Land Use

Future Directions in Land Use

This section of the plan will focus on the land use characteristics needed to support the projected population increase through the year 2035. In addition, it will project the community's probable housing demand and land requirements during the planning period.

For Mount Vernon to accommodate growth successfully, it must determine the character of that growth and assure that it enhances rather than alters the sense of the community. In addition, the city must have adequate land available for the projected growth. Land use projections should anticipate future growth needs and permit a reasonable amount of flexibility to accommodate possible changes in trends.

As mentioned before, a community benefits from compact growth. When development occurs incrementally, contiguous to the edge of existing development, a town grows in a unified way. This method of incremental growth reduces costs associated with public infrastructure extensions (sewer, water, transportation), and allows for the efficient movement of pedestrians and emergency vehicles.

Land Use Projections

Past trends in land development rates provide guidance in determining how much land will be needed to accommodate future growth in Mount Vernon (see the table on page 83). Projecting population, housing, and development trends of the last twenty years to 2030 would suggest 156 acres of additional residential land would be needed. This additional land would accommodate the community's anticipated housing needs up to the year 2030.

Land Use

Commercial and industrial land needs are more difficult to project. If the city aggressively pursues commercial or industrial development, possible projections could be skewed. Commercial and industrial development supplies cities with the resources necessary to provide services to the city's residents. It is important to provide a proper amount of land for business uses to serve the expected population. This includes promoting appropriate areas for commercial and industrial development. The city's Growth Area #1 contains the new bypass corridor and has over 1,445 acres of planned commercial and industrial land. This area takes advantage of the prime commercial corridor along Highway 30. This future industrial and commercial land will be more than enough to accommodate the region's anticipated growth.

For future recreation and open space needs, the Mount Vernon Plan projects the city's future population at approximately 6,000 residents in 2030. This represents about 1,825 non-student housing units by the end of the planning period – nearly 430 more than the current housing stock. Based on a park dedication standard of 0.05 acres per unit, future growth will require the dedication of nearly 22 additional acres of park and recreational space by 2030.

Land Use

Projected Land Use Needs by 2030, City of Mount Vernon

Land Use	Projected Additional Needs (Acres)	
Residential	156	
General and business park commercial	925	
Light industrial	520	
Park/natural areas and open space	22	
Total Land Needs	1,623	

Source: East Central Iowa Council of Governments

The above table displays the projected land use needs for Mount Vernon by the year 2030. The total suggests 1,623 acres of land will be needed to support the projected population increase. Future development outside the current city limits should be directed into the appropriate Future Growth Areas as shown on the Future Land Use Map, using compact, contiguous development patterns. This approach will help to ensure cost-effective, efficient development that benefits the entire region.

Land Use

Future Growth Areas

Mount Vernon should provide areas to accommodate future residential, commercial, and business park development in a way that enhances the overall quality of the city. As such, there are four primary future growth areas in and around the City of Mount Vernon. The growth areas are located on the future land use map and should be incorporated into any fringe-area agreement with Linn County and Lisbon. Development in these areas should be compact and contiguous to existing development. The areas include the following:

1. South Mount Vernon (Highway 30 Bypass Corridor)
2. West Mount Vernon
3. NE Mount Vernon
4. North Mount Vernon (north of the railroad tracks)

If, during the life of this plan, trends or priorities change, the city should update its future growth areas to include new annexation possibilities. The change should also be made to any fringe-area agreement with Linn County, as well.

By staying within these primary growth areas, the city will protect valuable environmentally sensitive ground and prime farmland from unwanted development, while meeting projected land use needs.

Land Use

Future Land Use

Specific land uses in the future growth areas are established on the future land use map (page 91) and will primarily consist of the following:

1. Growth Area #1: Business park, general commercial (gas stations, hotels, restaurants, etc.), light industrial and suburban residential, as shown on the map.
2. Growth Area #2: Traditional residential
3. Growth Area #3: Traditional residential and city park
4. Growth Area #4: Traditional residential, green corridor and light industrial, as shown on the map.

Growth Area #1

This area along the Highway 30 Bypass Corridor will be the new gateway into Mount Vernon. This corridor must be inviting to the traveling public. As such, well-placed, attractive signage and lighting must invite the highway traffic into the community. In addition, future development in the bypass corridor must adhere to special design and lighting standards by incorporating traditional design elements which enhances and reinforces the existing character of Mount Vernon. Land uses in this area may have to be redefined in the city's zoning ordinance (i.e. retail commercial) and specific design standards should be created which may include requirements for parking in the back for commercial and industrial uses, appropriate lighting, as well as specific building style and architectural appearance standards.

Land Use

Future growth in Area #1 should focus on four general land use types, as shown on the map: General Commercial, Business Park, Light Industrial and Suburban Residential. Specific land uses that the city would like to attract in the highway commercial area would include restaurants, gas stations, hotels, second floor housing and other suitable highway commercial retail options, including an anchor tenant that could become a regional draw. In the business park area, the city should focus on health care offices, research and other businesses which would require a campus-like location.

Separation of land use types in Area #1 should occur through natural means, such as berms and native landscaping. In addition, development in Area #1 should not detract from the city's historic Uptown district. Land uses should complement rather than compete with Uptown.

Growth Area #2

This area is the prime residential growth area of Mount Vernon. Located on the west side of the community and extending west out of the existing city limits, infrastructure already exists in the area for immediate development opportunities. Traditional residential should be the primary land use type in this area, following the recommendations from the Housing Chapter of this plan.

Growth Area #3

Located on the east side within the current city limits, this growth area is small but has residential uses surrounding its south and west sides. The railroad provides its northern boundary. Traditional residential should be the primary land use type in this area, following the recommendations from the Housing Chapter of this plan. Also located in this area would be a planned community park.

Land Use

Growth Area #4

This area is located north of the Union Pacific railroad tracks that run east and west through the community. As no infrastructure currently exists in the area, growth should not extend north out of the city limits until an infrastructure plan is in place. Prior to that, any growth in the area should be limited to traditional residential and light industrial, as shown on the map.

Because the railroad may act as a perceived impediment to future development, due primarily to extending infrastructure north across the tracks, but also to noise considerations, a bold approach is needed to overcome the perceived obstacle.

This plan proposes to create a green corridor or “linear park” along the north side of the tracks between 1st Street West and Highway 1. The linear park could include a boulevard for automobile traffic, linking the highway and 1st Street. It could also contain a pedestrian trail and park space. In addition to providing needed linkage between two primary roads in the area, it would also provide a significant buffer between the railroad and future housing in the area.

In the future, this green corridor could be extended west along the tracks to eventually connect Growth Area #2 at Irish Lane and then south to connect with Highway 30.

Land Use

Future Land Use Recommendations

The following recommendations are listed in no particular order, and are presented as a guide for city officials in making decisions about future land use in Mount Vernon. These recommendations correspond to the Future Land Use Map and respective growth areas.

1. Commercial / Industrial / Research – Business Park

Support planned business and research park development south of the city near the US Highway 30 Bypass. Support new commercial development which complements rather than replaces existing businesses (new population growth and improved access also create commercial development opportunities). In addition, there is the existing “Urban Corridor” which links Uptown with the new bypass area along Highway 1 through the community. An appropriate mix of commercial and residential uses are currently allowed in this corridor and should continue to develop over time.

2. Residential Development

Continue traditional residential development in the Stonebrook area as it is currently zoned residential and the infrastructure exists, as well as having more land available for development to the west and north.

Consider traditional residential development in the Wolfe-Martin area as it is currently zoned residential and infrastructure exists, as well as more land is available to the north.

Consider traditional residential development north of C & NW Railroad only as demand exists. There is no infrastructure currently within this area, but it is currently zoned residential.

Consider suburban residential development in the Oak Ridge area, as infrastructure exists and it is currently zoned suburban residential.

Land Use

3. Pursue Voluntary Annexation

Mount Vernon should use the “voluntary annexation” provisions of Iowa annexation law (including the 80/20 rule) and not annex areas under the “involuntary” procedures.

4. Enter into Fringe Area Policy Agreement with Linn County

The Fringe Area Policy Agreement is intended to provide for orderly and efficient development patterns appropriate to a non-urbanized area, to protect and preserve the fringe area’s natural resources and environmentally sensitive features, to direct development to areas with physical characteristics which can accommodate development, and to effectively and economically provide services for future growth and development. Within this agreement would be development standards and policies that would coincide with the County and City Land Use map.

5. Establish Sustainable Development Regulations

Establish sustainable development regulations within the city’s zoning and subdivision ordinance including efficient transportation patterns, mixed-use developments, green building practices, clean and renewable energy use, increased energy efficiency, best land management and conservation practices and walkability standards.

6. Create a linear park in Growth Area #4

The city should create a green corridor through Growth Area #4 to include a boulevard, trails and open space. This corridor would provide a connecting north-side link between Highway 1 and 1st Street, as well as providing a significant buffer between the railroad tracks and future housing growth.

Land Use

Land Use Map

The future land use map is generalized, but indicates the relative size, location and densities of land required to accommodate future growth. This map should be consulted prior to any decision regarding a proposed development or a request for a change in zoning. Doing so adds validity to the Planning and Zoning Commission's and City Council's decisions when considering planning requests. This review, along with adopted procedural requirements of the Commission and Council, and those in the Code of Iowa, should assist the city when faced with a legal confrontation about zoning and land use decisions. The Future Land Use Map contains the following land use designations for the future development of the City of Mount Vernon:

Residential: This includes all uses of land for residential dwelling, including single-family and multi-family developments. The densities of single-family and multi-family developments are shown on the map

Commercial: This category includes future commercial businesses around the community - where products, goods or services are sold and exchanged. Included are retail stores, business offices, service stations, amusement, food and other service establishments. These commercial uses are generally larger uses, supported by collector or arterial traffic. The Uptown District is a special commercial district as shown on the map.

Industrial: This category includes future industrial uses that involve the application of labor to materials to produce a product that is not normally sold to the ultimate consumer on the premises.

Park: This category includes property that serves the recreational needs of the residents of Mount Vernon. This includes land that is maintained, generally, in its natural state, landscaped or otherwise, for recreational use.

Land Use

[insert future and current land use maps here]

Land Use

Land Use Plan Analysis

This plan is intended to guide new development well into the 21st century. Its broad goals and objectives reflect the consensus of the Planning and Zoning Commission, City Council, and the citizens in and around Mount Vernon. The policy directions are to serve as a general guideline for more specific action undertaken by the residents and government of the City. These recommendations look several years into the future with the expectation that periodic updates will need to be done to reflect changes in the City and the region.

The city should be reminded that this plan does not establish any new ordinance or legislative mandate. The goals and policies contained in the plan are to be used as a guide for local officials in decision making and implementing specific developmental tools, such as the zoning and subdivision ordinances. While adoption of this plan does not commit the city to any specific recommendations, it should commit the city to actions that are consistent with the policy guidelines and the plan itself.





CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

Implementation and Administration

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Implementation and Administration

Administration Background

Once the plan has been adopted, the city should make every attempt to put the plan to work. However, no plan could possibly foresee every issue that will arise during the planning period. Therefore, the plan should be used as a guide for growth and development. Some developments will inevitably differ from the vision of the plan. However, if properly used, the policies and goals contained in the plan should provide the city with the flexibility to ensure each development fits with the overall vision of the community.

The goals, objectives and strategies on the following pages should reflect the day-to-day administration of Mount Vernon. The planning process should be an ongoing endeavor. The success of this plan will require the support of city residents as well as the City Council. Cooperation from the public and private sectors will allow implementation of the goals and objectives that will provide long-term benefits to the entire city.

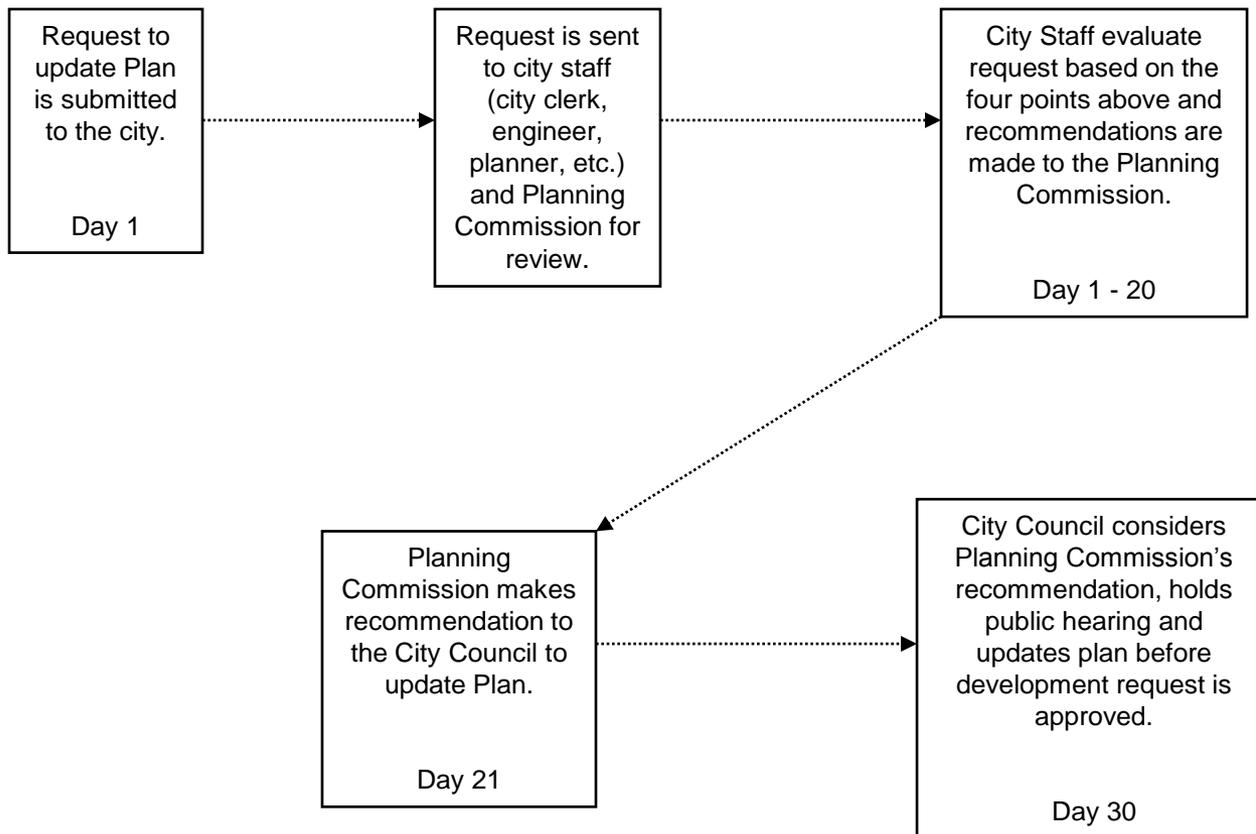
Development Review

Since the plan should be used as a guide for future growth, some developments will inevitably differ from the vision of the plan. In such cases, the plan may need to be updated. When reviewing all development proposals, the criteria for evaluation, is as follows:

- ❖ Consider Iowa's smart planning principles and elements
- ❖ Consider overall city goals
- ❖ Consider general city objectives and strategies
- ❖ Plan Maps

Implementation and Administration

Every attempt shall be made to satisfy the above criteria. However, if a development proposal cannot satisfy all of the criteria, yet is still deemed worthy to benefit Mount Vernon, the plan will need to be amended before the development proposal is approved. Because a request to amend the plan will likely occur during the development proposal review process, both actions may occur simultaneously. The city should establish a fee schedule for reviewing plan update requests. The following is the plan update process:



Implementation and Administration

Implementation

Responsibility for adopting and implementing future planning initiatives remains with the community guided by its civic and elected leadership. Generally the following principles guide implementation priorities:

- Focus on strategies, initiatives and projects that will have the most impact on the community when completed.
- Move forward on strategies, initiatives and projects that can be completed quickly, have significant public support or have available funding. Completion of these initiatives or projects creates significant visibility for recovery and helps solidify community and political support for continued recovery activities.

It is important to note that this plan does not establish any new ordinance or legislative mandate. The goals and policies contained in the plan are to be used as a guide for local officials in decision making and implementing specific developmental tools, such as the zoning and subdivision ordinances. While adoption of this plan does not commit the city to any specific recommendations, it should commit the city to actions that are consistent with the policy guidelines and action steps contained in the plan.

This section presents an implementation schedule for the recommendations, summarizing the actions proposed by the plan. Each action is listed generally in the order presented in the plan. The action is then given a specific time frame for implementation. Each dot is representative of a completion date. The schedule does not list ongoing policies or day-to-day actions the city should continuously undertake (i.e. maintenance of the city's street system). In this way, the schedule can be used to monitor the progress of the plan. This is an important role of the update process that will be necessary to keep this document dynamic and up-to-date.

Implementation and Administration

Plan and Administration Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
City Council and P&Z to meet annually to review plan goals and policies.	❖				General funds Zoning fees	City Council Planning & Zoning Commission Zoning Administrator City Administrator
Plan for approximately 1,825 non-student housing units.				❖		City Council Planning & Zoning Commission
Plan for a population of approximately 6,000 with the student population.				❖		City Council Planning & Zoning Commission
The City Administrator is tasked with the implementation of the comprehensive plan.	❖				Various sources	City Administrator City Council

Implementation and Administration

Quality of Life Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Maintain city's historic built environment	❖				Grants General funds G.O. bonds LOST funding	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission
Preserve Uptown District	❖				General funds G.O. bonds LOST funding	City Council Main Street Director Business leaders CDG
Create a walkable community			❖		General funds TIF funds G.O. bonds LOST funding	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission
Review city's environmental impacts and establish sustainable best practices, including rain barrel program for community residents and standards for solar and wind energy		❖			Grants General funds	City Council City Administrator

Implementation and Administration

Housing Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Integrate a variety of housing types into the community for all income and age levels	❖				Housing trust funds Grants	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission Housing Commission Developers
Create and support Housing Commission		❖			Grants Housing trust funds General funds	City Council City Administrator
Ensure enough available land for new housing development	❖				General funds	Planning and Zoning Commission Developers Property owners
Develop a local housing rehabilitation program		❖			Grants Housing trust funds General funds Local businesses	City Council Housing Commission City Administrator

Implementation and Administration

Housing Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Utilize incentives to encourage housing development	❖				TIF funds Tax abatements Grants General funds	City Council City Administrator Housing Commission
Work with Cornell College to accommodate anticipated increase in student enrollment	❖					City Council City Administrator Housing Commission
Encourage residential green building practices	❖				Grants Tax abatements General funds	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission Developers

Implementation and Administration

Economic Development Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Create and support a community economic development group		❖			General funds	City Council City Administrator CDG
Create a long-term economic development plan		❖			General funds	City Council City Administrator CDG
Partner with local economic development professionals		❖				City Council Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance
Financially support economic development efforts	❖				General funds Local businesses	City Council CDG Business leaders

Implementation and Administration

Transportation and Infrastructure Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Consider long-term green conservation efforts	❖				Grants General funds G.O. bonds TIF funds Stormwater management fees	City Council City Administrator City Engineer
Plan for a new well				❖	General funds Revenue bonds G.O. bonds	City Council City Administrator City Engineer
Manage daily water use in conjunction with new IDNR rules	❖					City Council City Administrator City Engineer
Promote permeable paving in new roadways, trails and parking areas	❖				LOST funds TIF funds Grants	City Council City Administrator City Engineer

Implementation and Administration

Transportation and Infrastructure Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Create a Highway 30 bypass area street plan		❖			General funds	City Council City Administrator City Engineer
Develop truck route through the community		❖			General funds	City Council City Administrator City Engineer
Develop system of connected trails and sidewalks throughout community	❖				LOST funds Grants Donations General funds	City Council Parks and Recreation Director City Engineer Planning and Zoning Commission
Ensure the creation of a north-south arterial street on the city's west side			❖		Developers	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission City Engineer

Implementation and Administration

Transportation and Infrastructure Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Develop plan for the replacement of aging infrastructure (streets, sewer, water)	❖				General funds LOST funds G.O. bonds	City Council City Engineer
Implement the three existing transportation related plans (2007 West Side Transportation Plan; 2010 Streetscape Plan; 2011 Living Roadways Plan)	❖				Various sources including LOST funding	City Council City Administrator City Engineer
Develop west-side multi-generational Stoner Park			❖		LOST funds General funds Donations Grants Developers	City Council City Engineer Parks and Recreation Director
Establish a pedestrian crossing at Highway 30 and 1 st Street SE			❖		LOST funds General funds Donations Grants	City Council City Engineer Parks and Recreation Director

Implementation and Administration

City Facilities Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Relocate police department to a new law enforcement center on the south side of the community			❖		General funds G.O. bonds Grants Donations	City Council City Administrator Police Chief
Establish new signage and parking for the community library		❖			General funds Grants Donations	City Council City Administrator
Construct a new community center				❖	LOST funds Grants Donations Local businesses General funds G.O. bonds	City Council City Administrator

Implementation and Administration

City Facilities Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Develop a long-range city facilities plan			❖		General funds	City Council City Administrator
Promote green building practices in all new public facilities	❖				Grants General funds G.O. bonds	City Council City Administrator
Coordinate / collaborate with all major stakeholders when addressing city facilities	❖					City Council City Administrator

Implementation and Administration

Land Use Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Review and update zoning and subdivision ordinances to ensure consistency with the comprehensive plan		❖			General funds Zoning fees	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission
Establish and adopt a Fringe Area Agreement with Linn County and the City of Lisbon		❖			General fees County funding	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission
Establish an annexation committee to foster communication with land owners in the growth area and review annexation requests		❖				City Council City Administrator City Engineer Planning and Zoning Commission
Ensure enough available land for new development	❖					Planning and Zoning Commission Developers Property owners Annexation committee

Implementation and Administration

Land Use Sector						
Action	Ongoing	Within 5 years	Within 10 years	Within 20 years	Funding Options	Leadership / Action Coordinator
Create gateway entrances into the community along the new Highway 30 route			❖		Grants Donations LOST funds General funds	City Council City Administrator
Establish sustainable development regulations		❖			General funds	City Council City Administrator
Establish design standards for Growth Area #1		❖			General funds	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission
Create Green Corridor through Growth Area #4 to include a boulevard, trails and open space				❖	Grants LOST funds G.O. bonds General funds	City Council Planning and Zoning Commission City Administrator City Engineer



CITY OF Mount Vernon *Iowa*

Appendix

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Appendix

Appendix

Glossary of Terms

Aesthetic: The perception of elements in the natural or created environment that are pleasing to the eye.

Amenity: A natural or created feature that enhances the aesthetic quality, visual appeal or makes more attractive a particular property, place or area.

Annexation: To incorporate a land area currently outside of the existing city limits into a municipality, with a resulting expansion in the boundaries of the municipality.

Appropriate Housing: Housing that is appropriate for all income and age levels.

Arterial Street: See *Street System Hierarchy*

Buffering: The plan calls for buffering in certain cases between different land uses to minimize negative impacts. Buffering can include open space, landscaped areas, fences, walls, berms or any combination thereof to physically separate or screen one use or property from another. In designing buffers, the city's zoning ordinance should allow flexibility for the type and size of the buffer.

Built Environment: Artificially created fixed elements, such as buildings, structures, devices and surfaces, which together create the physical character of an area.

Capital Improvements Plan: A local government's timetable or schedule of all future capital improvements to be carried out during a specific period and generally listed in order of priority, with cost estimates and sources of financing each project. A typical capital improvements plan is a five-year program. A capital improvement is generally a major construction project or the acquisition of large, expensive equipment.

Circulation: Systems and structures for the movement of people, goods, water, sewage, air or power by such means as sidewalks, trails, streets, highways, waterways, towers, pipes and conduits.

Collector Street: See *Street System Hierarchy*

Contiguous: Having a common boundary, next to, abutting or touching an adjoining property.

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Conservation: The preservation, protection or restoration of the natural environment, natural ecosystems, vegetation and wildlife.

Density: The number of housing units or structures allowed per unit of land. In Mount Vernon, current allowable density is approximately three housing units per acre or less.

Design Standards: A set of guidelines defining parameters to be followed in site and/or building design and development. Can also be used to define standards for infrastructure improvements as well.

Development: The physical construction of buildings and/or the preparation of land. Development activities include: subdivision of land; construction or alternation of structures, roads, utilities and other facilities; installation of septic systems; grading; and clearing of natural vegetative cover (with the exception of agricultural activities).

Environmentally Sensitive Land: An area with one or more of the following characteristics: (1) steep slopes, (2) flood plain, (3) soils with high water tables including wetlands and wetlands transition areas, (4) soils that are highly erodible or subject to erosion, (5) land incapable of meeting percolation requirements, (6) stream or river corridor, (7) mature stands of native vegetation, and (8) habitats of endangered species.

Floodplain: The land area on either side of the banks of a waterway subject to flooding.

Fringe-area agreements: See *Intergovernmental Agreement*

Future Growth Area: The corridors that define the potential growth area for the city. The corridors, as shown on the Future Land Use Map, can be generally described as where development outside of the city limits should be directed. Also called Urban Service Areas or areas that define the geographical limit of government-supplied public facilities and services.

Goal: Description of a desired state of affairs for the community in the future. Goals are the broad public purposes toward which policies and programs are directed. Generally, more than one set of actions (objectives) may be required to achieve each goal.

Green Space: See *Open Space*

Appendix

Growth Management: A wide-range of techniques used in combination to manage or influence the amount, type, location, density, timing and/or rate of growth. Growth management objectives often form the backbone of a comprehensive plan. Techniques used to execute growth management policies may include: zoning and subdivision ordinances, capital improvements, and designation of future growth or urban service boundaries.

IDNR: The Iowa Department Of Natural Resources

IDOT: The Iowa Department of Transportation

IEDA: The Iowa Economic Development Authority

Incremental Design: Method of development to maintain small town atmosphere and reducing sprawl by utilizing compact, contiguous growth to existing development.

Infrastructure: Public services and facilities needed to sustain residential, commercial, industrial and all other types of development activities. Infrastructure includes, but is not limited to sewage disposal systems, water supply systems, drainage systems, roads, parks, sidewalks, trails, schools, libraries, fire, police, emergency, medical facilities and public works facilities.

Intergovernmental Agreement (28E Agreement): A legal document binding two or more governmental units or agencies to act in certain, cooperative ways. The term is most often used in a planning context to refer to shared or delegated responsibility to review development proposals and/or to recognize adopted plans and policies of the governmental units or agencies. For example, the City of Mount Vernon and Linn County might create an intergovernmental agreement which requires each entity to provide materials on development proposals within certain geographic areas for the other entity to review and comment upon. Also called fringe-area agreements.

Issues: Points of debate, discussion or dispute in the community that are identified in the plan and are dealt with by the plan's goals, policies and objectives.

Land Use: A description of how land is occupied or utilized. Land use types typically include: various types of residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and public uses.

Local Street: See *Street System Hierarchy*

Appendix

Low-Impact Development: This type of development uses best practices in land planning, design and technologies to simultaneously conserve and protect natural resource systems and reduce infrastructure costs by mitigating potential environmental impacts.

Mixed-Use District: The development of a tract of land with a variety of complementary and integrated uses in a compact urban form. Mixed use within Mount Vernon could include a combination of properly planned commercial, residential and light industrial uses to ensure compatibility between each use.

Multi-modal Transportation: A term for the variety of transportation types, including motor vehicles, mass-transit, and pedestrian oriented (i.e. walking and bicycling).

Neighborhood: An area of a community with characteristics that distinguish it from other areas that may include distinct ethnic or economic characteristics, housing types, or boundaries defined by physical barriers such as a major highway or river.

Neighborhood Commercial: Small-scale business activity that is limited in size and operation to insure compatibility with adjacent neighborhoods and uses. It is generally within walking distance to local residential neighborhoods.

Objective: Individual accomplishments which, taken together, will enable the city to achieve stated goals.

Open Space: Any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to an open space use for the purposes of (1) the preservation of natural resources, (2) outdoor recreation (active or passive), or (3) public health or safety. Land used for the managed production of resources (farming, etc.) is not considered open space for the purpose of this plan.

Plan: The formulation and graphic representation of the means to reach a desired end, as well as the act of preparing a plan (community input, research and analysis). The Mount Vernon Plan is a written and graphic analysis of a desirable and feasible pattern of growth with goals and objectives to best serve the residents of the community. This plan is based on the input of the community and upon data and extensive research.

Appendix

Planning Area: The area specifically shown on the Future Land Use Map contained in this plan. It can be generally described as all the land within the corporate boundaries of Mount Vernon, as well as all the land within two miles surrounding the community. This is the area that directly influences the character, services and facilities of the City of Mount Vernon. This area may be amended from time to time as the city physically grows.

Planning Period: The period for which the projections and the goals and objectives of this plan were made (from the year 2016 to 2035).

Policy: Statements of government intent for which individual actions and decisions are evaluated.

Region: The region designated by the Iowa Legislature as State Planning Area 10. This region consists of six contiguous counties in eastern Iowa, including: Benton, Iowa, Linn, Jones, Johnson, and Washington, which are served by the planning agency East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG).

Sense of Place: The characteristics of a location that make it readily recognizable as being unique and different from its surroundings.

Setback: The distance between the permitted structure and the lot line. In Mount Vernon, the setback is regulated for the front, rear and side yards of principal and accessory uses.

Smart Planning: The State of Iowa has adopted Smart Planning principles and elements that cities and counties should consider when preparing plans and reviewing development proposals.

Strategy: Tasks that may be taken to achieve stated goals and policies.

Streetscape: All the elements that constitute the physical makeup of a street and that, as a group, define its character, including building frontage, paving, street furniture, landscaping (trees and other plantings), awnings and marquees, signs and lighting.

Street System Hierarchy: The Mount Vernon street system generally consists of three functional uses of streets: Arterial, Collector and Local streets. Arterial Streets provide a continuous route for the movement of large volumes of through-traffic across and beyond the city and between high traffic generation points. Collector Streets provide movement of traffic between arterial streets as well as providing limited access to abutting property. Local streets serve as a means of access to abutting property.

Appendix

Sustainable Development: Development that can be maintained over time without damage to the natural environment. Also, development that balances near-term interests with the protection of the interests of future generations.

Urban Design: The process of organizing the contextual elements of the built environment such that the end result will be a place with its own character or identity. Also, urban design can be described as planning the development of the built environment in a comprehensive manner to achieve a unified, functional, efficient and appealing physical setting.

Urban Sprawl: Uncontrolled growth, usually low-density in nature, in previously rural areas and some distance from existing development and infrastructure.

Use: The purpose for which a lot or structure is or may be leased, occupied, maintained, arranged, designed, intended, constructed, moved, altered, and/or enlarged in accordance with the zoning ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use categories.

Zoning: The delineation of districts and the establishment of regulations governing the use, placement, spacing and size of land and buildings.

Appendix

Community Input Results

The crucial element in any plan is ensuring that the wishes and hopes the residents hold for their community is represented in the content of the plan. If the plan does not accurately reflect the needs and desires of area residents, it will have little value.

Therefore, the City of Mount Vernon held a town meeting to attract public input. The meeting was held on a Saturday morning (in place of the Mayor's regularly scheduled "Big Picture" forum), on November 9, 2013.

The meeting was an interactive planning session with 36 residents taking part to begin to identify a future vision for the community. The session involved breaking into small groups identifying and prioritizing positive qualities that need to be maintained, as well as future concerns or challenges that need to be addressed. This exercise was held at the beginning of the planning process for two reasons:

- The critical elements for the future vision of the community are identified early in the process ensuring that appropriate problem identification occurs at the very beginning;
- Public participation is crucial for creating an effective and appropriate plan. By having a town meeting at the beginning of the process, every resident has an opportunity to direct the future vision for the planning area.

The results of the town meeting were used by the planning committee to assist them in the formulation of this plan. Because of the amount of data received during the three town meetings, the results are not included in this document. They will be made available at city hall and on the city's website. Many thanks to all those that took part in the town meetings.

Appendix

Notes