



Implementation

The Comprehensive Plan sets forth an agreed-upon “road map” for growth and development within the City of Marion over the next 10 to 15 years and beyond. The Plan is the product of considerable effort on behalf of the City Council, City staff, the Plan Commission, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, and the Marion community. The completion of the Comprehensive Plan is only the first step in the long-term process of achieving the community’s vision for the City.

Plan Adoption and Use

Marion’s updated Comprehensive Plan will serve as the official policy guide to long-range public improvements, land use, and development. This document, with periodic updates as required by state law, will provide the City with a decision-making framework over the next 15 to 20 years. It is essential that the Plan be adopted by the City Council and then be used on a regular basis by City staff, boards and commissions to review and evaluate all proposals for improvement and development within the community in the years ahead.

Review of Land Use and Development Controls

Zoning is an important tool in implementing planning policy. It establishes the types of uses to be allowed on specific properties, and prescribes the overall character and intensity of development to be permitted. Adoption of the new Comprehensive Plan should be followed by a review and update of the City’s various development controls including zoning, subdivision regulations, signage, landscaping and other related codes and ordinances.

It is essential that all development controls be consistent with, and complement, the new Comprehensive Plan. The City may have existing ordinances that contradict new or revised policies or prohibit desired improvements. For example, the City’s current landscaping ordinance currently prevents plantings in local right-of-way without special permit.

The Comprehensive Plan sets forth policies regarding the use of land within the City and establishes guidelines for the quality, character and intensity of new development to be promoted in the years ahead. The Plan’s policies and guidelines should greatly assist the City in formulating new zoning and development code regulations that can better reflect the unique needs and aspirations of the Marion community.

Zoning Ordinance Update

The City's Zoning Ordinance is based on its 1998 Comprehensive Plan. While the 1998 plan has served the community well, the community's vision and related planning goals and objectives have changed significantly over the past 11 years. This change is reflected in the planning policies of this Comprehensive Plan update.

The City is currently engaged in a process to update the zoning ordinance, but the timing and sequencing of this update may be problematic. The zoning ordinance should be used as a tool to implement Comprehensive Plan policies. As such, the zoning ordinance should be revised to reflect the current vision, goals, and objective of the community addressed in this plan.

In addition, the proposed Zoning Ordinance under consideration includes 21 different zoning districts. This number of districts may indicate that the ordinance is overly prescriptive. The City should examine strategies for consolidating the proposed zoning districts into a more flexible ordinance.

Signage Ordinance Update

The standards set forth in the City's existing sign ordinance uses general terminology that limits the ordinance's effectiveness. Moreover, while most of the exempt signs listed in the ordinance are temporary, the ordinance does not regulate area, height, and other sign features to prevent abuse. A comprehensive sign ordinance is an important component in maintaining attractive and successful commercial districts.

The City should revise its signage ordinance and establish policies for the extensive regulation of all sign types in a cohesive and flexible manner. In addition to addressing these issues, the City's new signage standards should vary based on the type of commercial area being served. Signage should be context sensitive and designed to complement the scale and character of development.

Land Use and Development Regulations

Several of the Plan's goals, objectives, and recommendations relate to the need to establish a more sustainable framework for future development. Current land use and development regulations are outdated and have permitted the creation of placeless and undesirable residential areas. Throughout the planning process, the community has expressed a desire for new regulations that hold development to a higher standard. Residents have asked for more quality parks and open space, safe sidewalks and trails, street trees and pedestrian-scale lighting, and high quality development that is diverse in type and style, visually interesting, and well connected to neighboring communities.

Furthermore, it is important that new residential development "pays its own way" and offset any negative impacts on local infrastructure and the surrounding community. If a developer cannot, or is unwilling to, meet these standards then they should look elsewhere. Residents and business owners do not wish to see development for the sake of development, rather they desire development that benefits the community as a whole.

Intergovernmental Coordination

The City of Marion should assume the leadership role in implementing the new Comprehensive Plan. In addition to carrying out the administrative actions and many of the public improvement projects called for in the Plan, the City may choose to administer a variety of programs available to local residents, businesses and property owners.

However, in order for the Comprehensive Plan to be successful, it must be based on a strong partnership between the City, other public agencies, school districts, various neighborhood groups and organizations, the local business community, and the private sector.

The City should be the leader in promoting the cooperation and collaboration needed to implement the new Comprehensive Plan. The City's "partners" should include:

1. Other governmental and service districts, such as the school districts, Marion Township, Linn County, the private utility companies, the Corridor MPO, the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), etc;
2. Regional and local institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce, Marion Economic Development Corporation, Hawkeye Area Community Action Programs, Inc., and various churches and religious institutions;
3. Local banks and financial institutions, which can provide assistance in upgrading existing properties, facilitating desirable new development and packaging assistance programs for residents and businesses;
4. Builders and developers, who should be encouraged to undertake improvements and new construction that conform to the Plan and enhance the overall quality and character of the community; and
5. The Marion community, since all residents and neighborhood groups should be encouraged to participate in the on-going planning process, and all should be given the opportunity to voice their opinions on improvement and development decisions within the community.

Enhance Public Communication

The City should prepare a brief summary version of the new Comprehensive Plan and distribute it widely throughout the community. It is important that all local residents, businesses and property owners be familiar with the Plan's major recommendations and the community's "vision" for the future.

The City should also consider additional techniques for responding quickly to public questions and concerns regarding planning and development. For example, the City might prepare a new informational brochure on how to apply for zoning, building, subdivision and other development-oriented permits and approvals. It might also consider special newsletter or Web page features that focus on frequently raised questions and concerns regarding planning and development or new City projects.

Implementation Action Agenda

The City should refine and add to the preliminary list of items above to prepare a detailed implementation “action agenda” which highlights the improvement and development projects and activities to be undertaken during the next few years. For example, the “action agenda” might consist of:

1. A detailed description of the projects and activities to be undertaken;
2. The priority of each project or activity;
3. An indication of the public and private sector responsibilities for initiating and participating in each activity; and
4. A suggestion of the funding sources and assistance programs that might potentially be available for implementing each project or activity.

In order to remain current, the “action agenda” should be updated once a year.

Regularly Update Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is not a static document. If community attitudes change or new issues arise which are beyond the scope of the current Plan, the Plan should be revised and updated accordingly.

Although a proposal to amend the Plan can be brought forth by petition at any time, the City should regularly undertake a systematic review of the Plan. Although an annual review is desirable, the City should initiate review of the Plan at least every two to three years. Ideally, this review would coincide with the preparation of the annual budget and capital improvement program. In this manner, recommendations or changes relating to capital improvements or other programs can be considered as part of the upcoming commitments for the fiscal year. The annual update of the City’s “action agenda” could also coordinated with the overall Plan review process.

Routine examination of the Plan will help ensure that the planning program remains relevant to community needs and aspirations. To maintain the Plan as a useful and pertinent policy guide, the City should:

1. Post copies of the Plan document online and make copies available for public purchase;
2. Provide assistance to the public in explaining the Plan and its relationship to private and public development projects and other proposals, as appropriate;
3. Assist the City Council in the day-to-day administration, interpretation and application of the Plan;
4. Maintain a list of current possible amendments, issues or needs that may be subject to change, addition or deletion from the Comprehensive Plan; and
5. Coordinate with, and assist the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council in the Plan amendment process.
6. Establish a Comprehensive Plan oversight advisory group (including key community leaders) to receive annual updates and give feedback.