



Community Facilities Plan

The City of Marion contains a number of community facilities providing residents and visitors with a variety of services. Community facilities include public schools and libraries, City services and administrative facilities, recreation facilities, and others. These facilities and services are essential to the community and enhance the quality of life for residents and improve conditions for local businesses.

This section of the Comprehensive Plan identifies future need for community facilities and offers long-range recommendations for future facility locations and improvements. The general recommendations of this Plan, however, are not a substitute for detailed planning to be undertaken by the City and other service providers.

It should be noted that many community facilities are not under the control or direction of the City of Marion. As such, the City should improve communication and coordinate planning efforts with other agencies including the local service providers such as the school districts and library, Linn County, state, and federal agencies. The generalized locations of future community facilities, such as schools or fire stations, do not preclude the need for the more detailed planning, programming, and site selection which fall within the purview of each respective agency of organization. Rather, these recommendations underscore the need for the City to work with other service providers to accommodate the appropriate expansion of community facilities within the City.

The community service providers discussed in this section have indicated a need new facilities or changes to City policy impacting their operation. A detailed inventory and discussion of existing community facilities, including those community service providers not discussed in this section can be found in the Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Report on file with the City.

Library

The Marion Public Library currently operates out of a single location, the Nancy A. Miller Marion Public Library located at 1095 6th Avenue in Uptown. Library services at this branch are available to all residents of Marion, Cedar Rapids, Hiawatha, and other Linn County municipalities containing a library.

The numbers of visitors and circulation have both increased significantly since 1996 when the Library moved to its current location. Library officials reports that the 24,500 sq. ft. library facility is not adequate to meet the community's current needs and significant expansion is required to accommodate current customer, collection, service, and operational demands. The Library prefers the expansion of the existing facility over the creation of a second library location and the Library Board of Trustees have a tentative expansion plan which entails a two-story wraparound addition. Should this expansion be realized, this expansion would remove most of the parking on the library's lot and additional parking would be needed.

The City should assess the prepared expansion plan for the Marion Public Library and identify potential funding sources to aid in its implementation should the City choose to endorse the plan. A detailed plan for Uptown Marion may also be required to fully address the parking and circulation needs of the library.



Schools

The schools within the City of Marion are located within two districts: the Linn-Mar Community School District and the Marion Independent School District. Marion Independent serves the older residential areas located in the central and southwestern portions of the City. The most recently developed portions of the community located in northern and eastern Marion are serviced by Linn-Mar, and new residential areas located in the City's growth areas will also be served by Linn-Mar School District.

Marion Independent School District

The Marion Independent School District's facilities include Emerson, Starry, and Francis Marion Elementary Schools, Vernon Middle School, and Marion High School. The district's enrollment is 1,850, but serves approximately 2,000 students in its buildings with an additional 750 students in home school assistance programs. The District has witnessed stable to slightly growing enrollment in recent years and anticipates this trend to continue.

The District's existing facilities are near capacity, but plans were in place to update, renovate, or replace some of these facilities. The district is in the process of adding six science labs to the high school and constructing a new middle school to replace the current facility. The new facility will be located on the same lot as the current facility. The District has no plans to build new facilities, though there may be a need to further renovate or expand existing facilities.

Linn-Mar Community School District

The Linn-Mar Community School District contains 10 schools and enrolled nearly 6,500 students in the 2008-2009 school year. The district's seven elementary schools are Echo Hill, Indian Creek, Linn Grove, Novak, and Wilkins in Marion and Bowman Woods and Westfield in neighboring Cedar Rapids. Its two middle schools are Excelsior and Oak Ridge. Its sole high school is Linn-Mar High School, with more than 1,650 students.

Linn-Mar has developed a ten year facility plan with several renovation and expansion projects scheduled to accommodate projected growth in student enrollment. In the future, the Linn-Mar School District plans to construct additions to four elementary schools and one of its middle schools. The District also has plans to construct several new facilities including:

- The School District has purchased 87 acres north of Echo Hill Road and east of C Avenue to serve as the future location of a secondary education building as well as another elementary or middle school location.
- Seventy-five acres have also been purchased to the south Echo Hill Road and east of Alburnett Road to serve as a future location for another elementary school. On the south end of the property is Oak Ridge Middle School; the north end houses Echo Hill Elementary.
- Though no property has been purchased, the District is anticipating a need for property east of Highway 13 and north of Prairie Ridge Road for an elementary school
- A new bus terminal and operations and maintenance building is to be located in the Marion Enterprise Center near 62nd Street and Linn Aire Avenue.

A more detailed discussion of the School District's existing facilities and planned expansion can be found in the Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Report on file with the City. The recommendations indicated in Figure 9 indicate the general expansion plan as outlined by Linn-Mar School District officials.

Coordination and Cooperation

Linn-Mar representatives indicated that though the City's preliminary 29th Avenue Sub Area Plan designates two areas for schools the district has no plans to locate a school in this area. Factors influencing this decision include current enrollment trends, anticipated housing density, the location of the County Home Road Sanitary Landfill, and the current location of existing schools. This situation highlights the need for improved communication between the schools districts and City.

Schools represent a relatively intense land use that generates high levels of traffic and consumes utilities at rates similar to commercial development. School facilities also represent a community asset that can benefit the City. The City and school districts should pursue a more collaborative approach to planning that seeks to minimize the negative impacts of school facilities on surrounding neighborhoods and maximize the utility of school facility locations and the corresponding benefits to the local community.

School Related Congestion

Congestion is common in areas surrounding local schools and is a common complaint reported to the Marion Police Department. Local streets that surround some of Marion's school facilities are not equipped to accommodate the higher pedestrian and vehicular traffic volumes related to schools. The City should work with the school districts, residents, and the appropriate transportation agencies to develop access and circulation improvements in school zones that reduce congestion associated with school functions and activities.

Public Safety

Police Department

Overall, the City of Marion has consistently had one of the lowest crime rates of comparable cities in the State of Iowa. The Marion Police Department operates one police station, located off of Katz Drive, and has 41 sworn and 9 non-sworn personnel, for a total of 50 employees. Current staffing levels are well below the national average for a municipality of Marion's size and though current economic conditions limit the department's ability to add personnel, grants are currently being pursued to add two additional officers.

The current police station facility, which was built in 1984, is inadequate for the current level of staffing as it was designed for 25 employees. The structure is also reported to leak in rainy weather and is poorly designed to function as a police station. There have been recent efforts to plan for a new facility, although no specific location for the structure has been indicated.

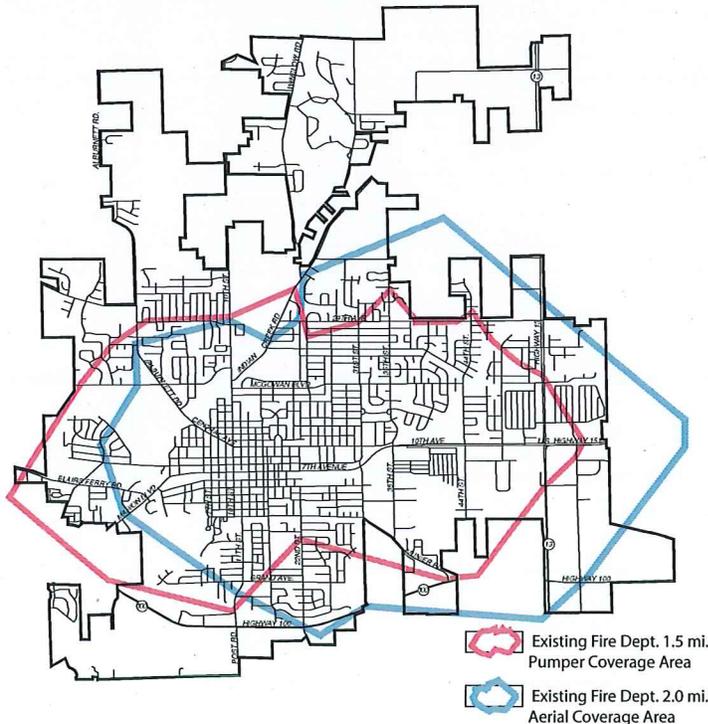
Staffing levels should be increased and facilities should be renovated, expanded, or relocated as necessary to enhance public safety. The City should identify additional resources to maintain the Police Department's ability to provide the high levels of service as the City grows.

Fire Department

The Marion Fire Department has a fire insurance rating of 3, equal to that of neighboring Cedar Rapids' Fire Department, and higher than neighboring smaller communities. This high rating is likely related to the strategic location of two fire stations that provide adequate response times to the majority of the City. This proximity to public safety facilities is also an important characteristic of any neighborhood and has a significant impact on the quality of life for residents living in those neighborhoods. This point becomes especially salient when one considers the fact that Emergency Medical Services comprise approximately 85% of the Fire Department's response base.

The northern portion of Marion is expected to experience growth and a new fire station will be needed as more residences are built. While near term growth can be accommodated by existing fire stations, a third fire station location will likely be needed within the next eight to ten years as the City experiences growth and annexation. The creation of new east-west routes will have a significant impact in determining the most viable location for a new fire station in northern Marion. The need for a station in the growth area will increase with future residential development near the proposed Tower Terrace Road extension. As indicated in the figure below, this area is currently the northern extent of existing station service areas. The absence of east-west travel routes in northern Marion currently minimizes the utility of a new station in this area and a new station is not likely to be constructed before these new routes are in place.

The City should take steps to accommodate future facility needs of the Fire Department and ensure continued high levels of service. This will include securing sites for a new fire station that takes advantage of newly created roadways to service future residential growth areas. The City should also consider the use traffic signal preemption devices and major roadway designs that accommodate emergency response traffic.



City Services

During the planning process, the City's various departments were asked to offer their input with regard to current and anticipated needs. Feedback received from specific City departments is discussed below.

Some service providers indicated that their current location was either inadequate or would be inadequate in the near term. Some City departments are also currently relying on rented space to meet their growing needs. It has been indicated by several departments that maintaining current levels of service is increasingly difficult as the resources available to the department have not increased as the City has grown.

The City should identify potential sites for the location new City facilities, such as a well site or maintenance facility, as well as potential funding sources to aid in expansion and construction efforts.

Engineering Department

The City's Engineering Department is responsible for planning and implementation of improvements to Marion's streets, sanitary and storm sewers, bridges, street lighting and traffic controls. The department also reviews all subdivision development plans and inspects the installation of the sewers and streets and grading work. Staffing levels are currently adequate, however the City intends to create a new stormwater utility program and the Engineering Department will need additional staff when this occurs.

The current funding dedicated to maintaining the City's existing infrastructure has also been cited as inadequate. Funds are being stretched to meet existing demand and additional funds are needed for system upgrades to meet the needs of the growing community and counter escalating costs.





Public Services Department

The Public Services Department is comprised of the Street Traffic/Maintenance Division, Sewer Maintenance Division, and Solid Waste Division. The current staffing level of 31 full-time employees is adequate, however the department is close to not being able to maintain the same level of service without additional personnel. Also, the department's equipment replacement fund sufficiently maintains the existing equipment, but additional equipment will be necessary if new personnel are added.

In addition to ensuring adequate personnel levels in its departments, the City should continue to pursue equipment purchases that will minimize long-term costs of infrastructure maintenance and replacement.

Water Department

The City's Water Department provides quality water obtained from six wells and four pumping stations to residents and businesses of Marion. The Water Department also oversees seven water storage tanks with a combined capacity of 4.2 million gallons. The current staff and equipment levels are adequate and a replacement schedule is in place to sufficiently maintain this equipment.

The City's water infrastructure is experiencing undue strain on its resources related to recent growth on the City's periphery. The Water Department is exploring locations for a new well site in the northern portion of the City between Alburnett Road and 10th Street. The Water Department also plans to search for a new well site east of Marion in anticipation of future residential growth and demand from a future business park.

Figure 9 identifies potential locations for future well sites in growth areas where development can be more readily accommodated using existing infrastructure and topography is advantageous for distribution.

The City should explore the creation of a series of impact fees to be assessed to new development that will pay for the upgrade and extension of City services and the maintenance and expansion of infrastructure such as roadways and water mains.