

Dubuque County Regional Comprehensive Plan Introduction

The Dubuque County Regional Comprehensive Plan is the result of a planning process that began in late 2010 and which is regional in nature in that it included participation by the County, the Soil and Water Conservation District and 7 cities including the cities of Asbury, Cascade, Dubuque, Dyersville, Epworth, Farley and Peosta. This plan seeks to build on the strengths of what we know to be a safe, livable, and friendly community.

The Dubuque County Regional Comprehensive Plan was created using information from the city's and county's comprehensive plans, the Soil and Water Conservation District, current census data, and local input and will serve as Dubuque County's Comprehensive Plan. The comprehensive plan has two primary purposes. The first provides an essential legal basis for land use regulation, such as zoning and subdivision control. Secondly, the comprehensive plan presents a unified vision for a community derived from the input of its citizens and establishes the specific actions necessary to fulfill that vision.

The intent of a comprehensive plan is to cast a wide net and touch on all topics relevant to the future development of the community. On its own, a comprehensive plan has no legal authority, it is merely an agreed upon road map for the future development of the community. Because it deals with issues that may be as many as thirty years down the road, the plan cannot chart a highly specific course. Instead it points the way towards goals and objectives and acts as a reminder of the general policies that the community should consider when making development decisions.

To achieve the goals and objectives listed in its comprehensive plan, a community must actively work to incorporate the recommendations of the comprehensive plan into its budgets, policies, and ordinances. Many of the goals and objectives listed in the Plan will require additional research and analysis, public input, and consideration from the County before they can be implemented. When choosing how to implement the goals and objectives of this plan, the Dubuque County Board of Supervisors should consider all relevant factors and weigh the public good with the cost and impact to private property owners. Examples of factors to be considered include:

- The costs and benefits of the project. A project may increase the tax base, create jobs, create new recreational opportunities, improve environmental quality, or create other benefits to the public, but it may also create costs such as extension of roads, increase in traffic, incur maintenance or other reoccurring fees, etc. The County should diligently analyze each project, weigh its benefits against its cost, and select the most cost-efficient and effective method for implementing the project.

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- Impacts on private property rights. In implementing this plan, the County should seek to strike a balance among many competing demands by creating development patterns that are orderly and rational, and provide the greatest benefits for individuals and the community as a whole, while balancing private property rights.
- The costs to provide roads, sewer, water etc. to new development. The location, size, and scale of new development affects the cost of providing services to that development. Prior to approving a new development project, the County should consider the cost to provide services to the new development. Typically, rural subdivisions take up at least twice as much land and cost about 40 percent more to provide with public services than do subdivisions within or adjoining existing communities. This type of development can lead to the loss of productive farmland and to conflicts with neighboring farmers over dust, odors, and other aspects of modern farming. (Taken from Feb 2001 ISU Land Use Series on The Comprehensive Plan.)
- The burden on existing public services. Most public services including roads, police and fire protection, water and sewer facilities, and schools have a limited capacity. When implementing a project, the County should determine if enough excess service capacity exists to meet the needs of any new development and that development is not a burden on the community as a whole.
- Compliance with state and federal law. When implementing any projects related to this plan, the County should be aware of any state or federal laws relating to the project to make sure the public is protected and development occurs in a safe and environmentally friendly way.

Once adopted, the comprehensive plan is not an infallible or unchangeable document. One large development could require changes to the plan. This plan should be updated every 5 to 10 years or when necessary so that it continues to provide an accurate picture of how the community wishes to grow, develop and prosper.