STORY COUNTY COMMUNITY PLANNING ASSISTANCE TEAM

A Strategic Story: A Framework for Story County Economic Development

Final Report
Story County, Iowa
January 19, 2012
The American Planning Association provides leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating excellence in community planning, promoting education and citizen empowerment, and providing the tools and support necessary to effect positive change.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2011, in Story County, Iowa, the Board of Supervisors decided to become more proactively involved in Story County economic development. As one of the first steps in this new initiative, Story County Planning and Development (then known as Planning and Zoning) applied for and received an American Planning Association (APA) Community Planning Assistance Team (CPAT).

APA CPATs are provided to help communities solve critical planning and economic development challenges. They consist of planners from all over the US with expertise in areas relevant to the specific design challenge.

APA agreed to support a Story County CPAT because of the importance of the Supervisors’ economic development efforts, their commitment and the likely success of the project. Story County has demonstrated that they have the necessary combination of political leadership, staff expertise, community support, regional partnerships, and financial resources.

The citizens of Story County have described their economic development ambitions as those that:
- Create and retain jobs
- Recruit and expand high value businesses that will increase the tax base
- Promote and grow businesses strategically aligned with Story County’s assets: bioscience research and innovation, renewable energy, and agricultural production
- And enrich the environment in which citizens live, learn, work, and play.

During two visits to Story County (preliminary visit in September and full team visit in October), the CPAT toured the County, held seven stakeholder meetings, and analyzed strategic opportunities. The team presented its final recommendations in a televised presentation to the Supervisors and the community on October 26, 2011.

The Story County CPAT recognizes that economic development and quality of life are interwoven together. Business location and expansion decisions are based on financial feasibility, but they are also based on how appealing a community is for its employees and executives. People and businesses are increasingly footloose and have a huge variety of options in where they locate. Quality of life is often a major part of those final decisions, including, but certainly not limited to, such diverse things as walkable downtowns, urban amenities, cultural activities, safety, recreation, aesthetics, clean air and water, shared economic benefits, local food, agricultural preservation, education, and strong sense of place. Any economic development strategy in Story County should reflect on the quality of life in addition to providing jobs, economic activity and improved tax base.

The APA Story County CPAT recommends strategic efforts and investments in four broad areas to support improved economic development and quality of life:
1. **Vision and long range planning**
   - Host a visioning process to build a shared vision for the County. Such community consensus essentially pre-permits economic development and community investments by building agreements before stakeholders get polarized.
   - Write a long range plan (potentially, but not necessarily, a “comprehensive” plan) to memorialize the community vision and coordinate special planning projects, as well as routine governance and investments to implement that vision.

2. **Strategic partnerships and investments**
   - Expand partnerships with traditional economic development entities (e.g., economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and Iowa State University Research Park) and non-traditional entities (e.g., Community Foundation, community development corporations). Ensure shared conversations and decision-making as appropriate and feasible.
   - Invest in targeted economic development projects. Focus on strategic investments that serve the greater good and advance the community vision.
   - Leverage outside resources to catalyze downtown development, create jobs, and increase business activity without consuming large amounts of productive farmland.
   - Undertake a careful analysis and coordination of all significant capital investments in the county in order to leverage existing resources around a community vision.
   - Align capital investments for all county entities in a multi-year Capital Improvements Program. Analyze investments based on immediate needs balanced with the overall community vision, including analysis of how investments meet the economic development and long range plan objectives.

3. **Trails, recreation and other quality of life issues**
   - Create a complete bicycle network interconnecting cities, through the expansion of trails and development of bicycle lanes and cycle tracks.
   - Focus on trail and recreation improvements that support general desirability of small city centers and leverage small scale hospitality investments in those cities.
   - Improve focus on what Story County does best and what residents and potential business owner’s value.

4. **County planning organization**
   - Reorganize county planning functions to support its new economic development role: streamline operations by merging the Zoning Board of Adjustment into the Planning Commission, create a new mission statement that reflects modern responsibilities, and create a name more reflective of what planning should do.
   - Invest in the creation of a new planning and development staff person to coordinate the new county effort in economic development including development of new resources; provide support for small city revitalization; and provide a single-point-of-contact for county permitting and economic development activities.
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Historically, Story County cities and other private and not-for-profit organizations have taken the lead in economic development, with the County playing only a minor role. The Story County Board of Supervisors, which combine the legislative and chief executive functions of the County, have a new proactive approach to economic development. The Board of Supervisors, with staff support from Story County Planning and Development, has been exploring the options for kicking off this more activist approach.

In 2011, the Supervisors’ efforts included:

1. Playing a more activist role on the Ames Economic Development Commission; and
2. Committing time and resources to pursue proactive economic development efforts; and
3. Authorizing a new staff initiative to support local foods and farms, which provides both economic development and health benefits; and
4. Applying to the APA for a CPAT to identify a possible framework for County economic development efforts and support the resulting CPAT.
5. Renaming Story County Planning and Zoning to Story County Planning and Development.

Story County is committed to partnering with the many mature economic development entities in the county. The Supervisors’ vision is “not to lead economic development efforts, but to be at the table all the time” as a credible and active partner. In order to be most effective, however, the County does not want a series of unrelated ad hoc actions (the “shotgun approach”), but wants to identify a clear framework around which to organize their activities.

In their application to the APA, Story County provided a compelling vision of the economic development opportunities and the County’s commitment for positive change. The American Planning Association was pleased to fund the project as part of its CPAT program.

APA Story County CPAT Process

In January and February 2011, the Story County Board of Supervisors began discussions on how to get more proactively involved in Story County economic development efforts. The Board explored creating an economic development strategic plan and/or a new framework for county government involvement in economic development.

On February 22, 2011, Story County Planning and Development (then known as the Story County Planning and Zoning Department), on behalf of the Board of Supervisors, applied for assistance from the APA in the form of a CPAT. APA CPATs are provided to help communities solve critical planning and economic development challenges. They consist of planners from all over the US with expertise in areas relevant to the specific design challenge, supported by an APA staff person in the field and additional APA staff in Washington. Team members donate their time, APA funds staff support and staff travel, and the host community funds the travel expenses for the planners.

In the spring of 2011, APA agreed to provide a CPAT to Story County. APA reviewed the application and agreed to execute the effort because of the importance of the Supervisors’ economic development interests and likely success of the project. Story County has demonstrated that they have the necessary combination of political leadership, staff expertise, community support, regional partnerships, and financial resources.
On September 28th and 29th, 2011, an APA staffer and the APA Story County CPAT team leader visited Story County to explore possible strategic partnerships, challenges and opportunities. The preliminary visit consisted of a tour of the County and held three stakeholder focus group meetings (county planners and Supervisors, small city officials, and large city officials) and reviewed relevant documents.

The entire five-person APA Story County CPAT project took place from October 23rd to 27th, 2011. This full visit began with tours of the County and its cities. The team held four stakeholder meetings:

1. County planners and Supervisors
2. Staff and officials from Story County cities
3. Economic and community development partners
4. A public town hall meeting

The APA Story County CPAT analyzed relevant plans, reports, and regulations and explored strategic opportunities. Planning students from Iowa State University provided graphic and research support to the team.

The APA Story County CPAT presented their findings to the Supervisors and the community in a televised meeting. This report is the final product of this effort, although APA and the CPAT will remain available for continued communications.
STORY COUNTY BACKGROUND AND ISSUE SUMMARY

By many measures, Story County is an economic success story. The unemployment rate is dramatically lower than that of the United States as a whole and wages are generally stable or increasing. Although wages are often lower than many larger urban markets, the cost of living, especially housing, is so much lower than in many urban markets and in the United States as a whole that overall purchasing power is excellent. Agricultural prices, both of land and commodities and other products are higher than they have been in over a generation.

Physical and social infrastructure is generally excellent. Transportation is easily accessible for goods, with excellent freight rail access and highways, especially Interstate 35 and US 30, an international airport in Des Moines, a municipal airport in Ames, and very little traffic congestion. In Ames, Iowa State University (ISU) turns out well educated professionals, with an especially strong focus in life sciences, and the Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) provides career, vocational, and technical training. Two community hospitals support a medical cluster to serve local needs. Small but significant manufacturing facilities provide a relatively stable manufacturing sector.

Industrial Classification of Employed Works in Story County Laborshed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>% of Laborshed</th>
<th># Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>77,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, Insurance &amp; Real Estate (FIRE)</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>36,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration and Government</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>35,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale &amp; Retail Trade</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>34,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare &amp; Social Services</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>34,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>27,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>26,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Services</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>15,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation, Communications &amp; Utilities</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>14,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>8,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>5,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>2,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Iowa Workforce Development, August 2011)

All aspects of Story County’s economy are critical for the economic activity, jobs, and taxes that they produce. All aspects are also critically important for the quality of life and the diversity of opportunities that they provide. Manufacturing, research, and offices generate economic activity, and they provide community vitality. Downtowns and city centers provide some retail activity, but they also provide a sense of place that is critical for residents and visitors alike. Agriculture provides not only obvious economic benefit but contributes to the rural lifestyle and makes the landscape rich and beautiful.

Story County population growth has been outpacing the state of Iowa as a whole; from 2000-2010 the number of people living in Iowa increased by 4% compared to Story County’s increase of 12%. Cities in the western portions of the county grew significantly, while those in the east were stable or slightly declining. Ames and Huxley represent nearly all of the population growth over the ten year period. It should be noted that some growth in population in the cities was due to annexation activities, resulting in a net loss to unincorporated areas of the county.
### Population Change, Story County (2000 to 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ames</td>
<td>50,731</td>
<td>58,965</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>8,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colo</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>1,082</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huxley</td>
<td>2,316</td>
<td>3,317</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>1,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelley</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maxwell</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>113</td>
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<tr>
<td>McCallsburg</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>6,658</td>
<td>6,798</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>140</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roland</td>
<td>1,324</td>
<td>1,284</td>
<td>-3.0%</td>
<td>(40)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheldahl</td>
<td>164*</td>
<td>156**</td>
<td>-4.9%</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slater</td>
<td>1,306</td>
<td>1,489</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story City</td>
<td>3,228</td>
<td>3,431</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zearing</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>-10.2%</td>
<td>(63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unincorporated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story County</td>
<td>9,039</td>
<td>8,703</td>
<td>-3.7%</td>
<td>(336)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total All Story</td>
<td>79,981</td>
<td>89,542</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>9,561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Iowa Workforce Development, August 2011)

*Source: 2000 U.S. Census block data

**Estimate based on population change for the City of Sheldahl as a whole (including portions in Bonne and Polke counties) between 2000 and 2010.

With an excellent and largely uncongested highway system, automobile transportation is easy within Story County and to Ankeny, Des Moines and adjacent counties. This allows people to travel longer distances to work, play, and shop than in most urban markets. The average commute in Story County is significantly faster than the US average, although many people do drive significant distances to work. As such, economic development anywhere in the county provides positive benefits for the entire county (increasing fuel costs, however, may make long commutes prohibitively expensive for some).
Image 1: Survey Zones by ZIP Code, Story County Laborshed Area
Source: Iowa Workforce Development

Image 2: Commuter Concentration by Place of Residence into Nevada
Source: Iowa Workforce Development
Image 3: Commuter Concentration by Place of Residence into Ames
Source: Iowa Workforce Development

Image 4: Commuter Concentration by Place of Residence into Story City
Source: Iowa Workforce Development
Image 5: Commuter Concentration by Place of Residence into Huxley
Source: Iowa Workforce Development
Residents speak at the APA Story County CPAT town hall meeting about the connection of economic development and the quality of life:

- “Development of local food systems is ED…Fertile soil in Story County is the foundation of economic development.”
- “The best predictor of the future is the number of people <25 with college degree.”
- “Urban amenities and downtown are needed to retain young people.”
- “For economic development, it’s the quality of life.”
- “Capitalize on diversity.”
- “Trails are part of the infrastructure that draws young people in.”

The Story County economic development climate is generally positive. Communities are receptive to economic development efforts and public officials and private investors have a history of successful partnerships. Public officials, political leaders, and planners are able to view economic development through a county and regional lens, understanding a strong economy benefits the entire region.

By many measures, Story County has a great quality of life. Housing and cost of living is affordable by any national standard. Jobs are available. The education system is strong with Iowa State University, Des Moines Area Community College, and highly ranked public schools located in the county. Ames and the university create a strong and attractive retail, service, sports, educational, and cultural center. Open space and trails are plentiful, albeit not interconnected. Traffic congestion, crime, and many measures of urban stress are all low. Story County is Iowa’s third healthiest county, out of 99 counties, according to CountyHealthRanks.org.

Story County has its share of challenges. The poverty rate is significantly higher compared to Iowa as a whole and slightly above the overall US poverty rate. As a small rural county, with Ames (population 60,000) as the only urban area, the job market is small and certain specializations (e.g., commercial airport, tertiary hospital, larger cultural activities) are concentrated in Des Moines, the state capital, just south of Story County.
From the air and on the ground, Story County is dominated by agriculture. It is the heart of the US Corn Belt and its agriculture is heavily dominated by corn and, to a lesser extent, soybeans. The vast majority of crops are commodities. The mechanized nature of commodity farming means few agricultural jobs (1.8% of the workforce), but the number is much higher if farm-related industrial and services jobs were included. Ames and Colo have downtown farmers markets and there is an increasing focus on local foods and community supported agriculture (CSA) farms, but still only a very small percentage of crops feed local retail customers.

For the most part, land set aside for industrial and commercial growth is within or immediately adjoining incorporated cities. Some areas that have been annexed or have been part of annexation discussions include: Lincoln Highway between Ames and Nevada, the area south and southwest of Nevada, and 315th Street between Huxley and Cambridge. These annexations do not represent the compact incremental urban expansion found in most other areas and may result in some unwarranted loss of prime agricultural soils and farmland.

Likewise, sprawling land use patterns do not predominate in Story County. Ames and Huxley, however, have their share of low density suburban subdivisions spreading out from the urban center and there are a few other low density subdivisions within the county. These developments also result in unwarranted loss of prime agricultural soils and farmland, sometimes without the offsetting economic benefits that come from industrial and business development.

The three leapfrogging industrial/annexed areas, and to a lesser extent Ames’ suburban housing and commercial development, have resulted in policy disagreement between municipalities. These disagreements, however, do not lessen the generally strong support for economic development or the positive economic climate.

Although the price of agricultural land has risen dramatically in recent years, partially as a result of high commodity prices and to some extent from land speculation, the price of farmland is still inexpensive from a development perspective. This low land cost and lack of coordinated growth policies has reduced the pressure that exists in many larger urban markets to keep new
Downtowns/small city centers get a mixed report card. Ames, the primary city, has a strong vibrant downtown with some upper floor vacancies and a decent, although not as strong, college commercial center called “Campus Town.” Ames, however, has some significant infill possibilities in and around downtown and Campus Town.

Story City and Nevada have the bones for strong downtowns and have some commercial presence, but both suffer from high vacancies, relatively low foot traffic, close proximity to Ames’ commercial market, and competing strip centers.

All of the cities have remnant city centers that still serve a critical role in identifying the community but an extremely limited commercial role. It is unlikely the small city main streets will ever be the commercial centers they once were, and selective demolition is probably necessary. However, the small city centers provide the opportunity to reinforce community sense of place and quality of life, provide housing that doesn’t sprawl onto farmland, and provide a very small, but defining, economic niche.

A large wind generator farm has recently been developed in the northeasterly section of the county, and with it a Story City facility for maintaining wind generators. This wind farm creates green energy, keeps dollars in the local economy, creates a sense of momentum on sustainability, provides the county with a significant tax base expansion, and, relative to the size of the wind farm, has only displaced a negligible amount of farmland.

While Story County has supported economic development for a long time, traditionally it did not play an activist role. Non-road infrastructure investments, regulatory reform, coordination with city economic development activities and strategies, regional economic development services, and intergovernmental agreements related to all of the above have been extremely limited.

In the past, County Supervisors did not want to invest in the unincorporated areas’ non-road infrastructure both because they didn’t see that as their traditional role and they had a warranted
fear that any such investment would be immediately annexed by the nearest cities. Economic development planning, strategies, and services were all seen as outside of the traditional land use planning and regulatory service function of Story County Planning and Development.

There has been a paradigm shift at the County Supervisor level and they now see economic development as a critical role for the County. Supporting larger cities, leading smaller cities, providing economic development investment, lending planning support services, and other related actions are now real possibilities for the supervisors. Story County Planning and Development and the Planning and Zoning Commission are supportive of these new efforts and ready to help lead the way. Economic development in any part of the County benefits the entire County, if the development is well done.
COMMUNITY VISIONING AND LONG RANGE PLANNING

Story County has a Development Plan focused on land use. There are other planning documents that cover other aspects of planning, but no overall view of where the County wants to go and how to get there. CPAT recommends Story County develop a coordinated long range plan. By incorporating all the key subject areas under a single document, conflicting and competing goals can be reworked to provide clear direction on important community issues.

General Topic areas for a Long Range Plan:
- Land Use and Growth Opportunities
- Downtown Revitalization
- Business Retention and Expansion
- Agricultural Preservation
- Housing and Historic Preservation
- Transportation and Public Works
- Food Systems and Public Health
- Parks, Trails and Recreation
- Natural Resources and Hazard Mitigation

Community Visioning
Community visioning is a process for a community to define the future they would like to see. The process is citizen-led, where community values, goals and strategies are shared. Citizens in open public forums and other venues identify desirable changes for the future. Visioning focuses on the positives and the community’s assets instead of needs. By focusing on the community’s attributes, citizens are engaged and energized, which is important since it will be the citizens’ Story County that will be the agents of change. Upon completion, the community vision provides a foundation upon which to build a long range or comprehensive plan.

Visioning is not necessary when communities are in full agreement on important issues such as urban growth, affordable housing, and transportation. The CPAT sensed that although there appears to be consensus on maintaining the rural character of the county, there is not full agreement on where growth and investments should occur in Story County. Therefore, CPAT recommends a visioning process be undertaken with a focus on those key areas where there is disagreement or unclear direction on growth issues and community life.

A community vision will form the basis for a targeted economic development strategy. It will clearly communicate opportunities for business growth and expansion. By achieving upfront agreement, the development process becomes streamlined. Most importantly, this vision framework becomes a tool for the entire community to express its values and desires to business prospects. Creating a community vision is not a substitute for a long range plan. Visioning however provides a rational framework for more meaningful questions and the collection of data for the preparation of a long range plan. Without a clear vision for the County, studies, special planning projects, and data
collection are likely to be disconnected and will be less meaningful in helping the community make decisions that serve residents and businesses well.

Earlier this year, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development announced funding for long range plans for regions to integrate economic development, land use, transportation and water infrastructure planning, policies and investments. The “Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants” for multi-jurisdictional partnerships were available for plans that support critical capital improvements. The 2011 grant application deadline has passed. The current administration is committed to place-based community revitalization efforts. The County should continually track this and other funding opportunities through HUD and the White House Office of Urban Affairs.

A long range plan is typically written by a consultant, which brings in new ideas to the County and doesn’t drain staff resources. An alternative approach is for Story County planning staff to coordinate the process if staff has the skill set to do this work and the charge to challenge the status quo. This would consume a large amount of staff time and would probably require increasing staff temporarily, but it is still a less expensive model and one that allows greater local knowledge. An effective hybrid that may be appropriate for Story County is a locally coordinated and written plan with a consultant hired for a peer-review of the planning process and draft plans and any specific components where an outside skill set is required.

Strategic Partnerships
City and economic development staff voiced a desire for the County Board of Supervisors to increase their visibility and leadership in the business community. Supervisors not only provide financial assistance, but they are also the keepers and promoters of the community’s vision. The County can play a unique role in expanding partnerships, coordinating investments between multiple entities, and advocating for increased vitality of Story County.
Non-traditional partners
Developers and large business interests should continue to be involved in partnerships for economic generation. Opportunities also exist in partnering with non-typical organizations such as the Research Park, Farm Bureau, Community Foundation, and Iowa State University Extension.

We recommend the County develop an outreach program specifically to develop relationships with these non-traditional partners. For example, the County and its smaller eastern cities could approach the Farm Bureau to explore agricultural-based economic development opportunities. It is possible that the County, a city, and Farm Bureau could collaborate to develop a year-round fresh food market highlighting local produce, eggs, dairy, and meat for communities with no local access to supermarkets. The farm fresh market could also provide a location for CSA pick-ups and food bank operations.

Economic Gardening
People do business with those who they know and trust. We recommend the County develop a comprehensive outreach program to begin building bonds between government and local entrepreneurs and businesses. In addition to being represented on boards and commissions, the primary County staff person should create and implement a business communications strategy. Site visits to small businesses can be especially rewarding to develop one-on-one relationships and determine ongoing needs of companies. The County can assume the role of working with its partners to nurture businesses and help bring in needed resources to grow these entities.

Food Market Case Study: Kauai Community Market

Kauai Community College on Kauai Island, Hawaii, partnered with the Kauai County Farm Bureau to create a year-round community market in 2009. The market has become a huge success, serving as a community gathering place where locals from the island and visitors congregate each Saturday morning. The market features fresh fruit and produce as well as packaged products from local producers. According to the Kauai Community Market’s website, the market “is a gathering place where farmers, local businesses, educators and students, residents and visitors all come together with one thing in common- an interest in buying fresh, buying local and supporting agriculture on Kauai.” Apart from selling food, the market also features agricultural and culinary demonstrations, events and information from Kauai agriculture non-profits and school programs.

The Kauai Community Market is not the first of its kind in Hawaii. It was created based upon another Farm Bureau-community college partnership between the Hawai‘i Farm Bureau Federation and the Culinary Institute of the Pacific at Kapi‘olani Community College. Other such community markets have been established throughout Hawaii. In each case an advisory committee that consisted of stakeholders— including representatives from farming and food industries, agriculture education and the business community—met regularly to help shape the concept for the market.
Economic Gardening is a concept developed by Chris Gibbons in Littleton, Colorado, in partnership with The Center for the New West. Its basic premise is that the strongest potential for job and economic advancement is in growing local entrepreneurs, as opposed to recruiting businesses from outside an area, termed ‘economic hunting’. For more information, visit Littleton’s webpage at www.littletongov.org/bia.

Focused Leadership
Businesses of Story County continually create plans and strategies for growth. The County needs to do the same. By identifying its strengths, existing assets, and relationships, the community can begin to form a vision of what kind of place it will be in ten or twenty years. Once the vision is known, it is imperative that the County Board of Supervisors stay focused and maintain the enthusiasm for achieving a brighter economic future. Decisions must be calibrated to the long term vision, and resources budgeted appropriately.

In addition to development of a long term plan, we recommend the County audit its existing policies, plans, and budgeting processes and modify where necessary to meet the ideals of the vision.

The Board is clearly proud of strides made in the County, and they should continue to be vocal proponents and partners in economic development.

Infrastructure Investments
Ample infrastructure is critical to expanding growth opportunities and for maintaining businesses within Story County. As public sector funding decreases and the need for more economic activity increases, the County will need to be calculating in how and where money is spent. We recommend a three-pronged approach to infrastructure investments that encourages economic development:

1. Maximize existing infrastructure capacity;
2. Coordinate public investments with a focused growth plan; and
3. Leverage new spending by pooling resources with other governments and private sector investors.

Maximize Capacity
Existing assets should not be overlooked when considering Story County’s economic development ventures. Over the years, Story County and its partners have expended millions of dollars to build roadways, utility lines and, within the cities, water and wastewater systems. Few of these assets in the county are being used to the fullest extent.

Available infrastructure capacity should be leveraged to encourage new development. The simplest way to achieve this is for the County and its municipalities to develop a joint policy prioritizing growth and expansion to sites at or near existing services. Such a policy also has the effect of furthering the county’s goal to preserve prime farmland and natural areas.

Land Inventory
Local government investors, as well as developers, can save much time and money by using sites that have already received infrastructure investment. We recommend the County and its partners
create an overall inventory of underused and vacant industrial and commercial land, to support its new approach to business expansion and recruitment. The inventory should identify sites that are already served by paved roads, water and wastewater systems, and utility lines, and those that can receive extended services quickly and economically. The industrial and commercial land inventory is different from the state’s locator service, in that it includes all properties with service, not just parcels currently for sale.

The land inventory provides a foundation for development of the County’s economic development vision plan and for further conversations with the Cities about growth and annexation. In time, the County and Cities could use the inventory to ‘pre-permit’ sites for development. Reducing the time for permitting properties creates an additional development incentive that is relatively low cost.

Downtown Beyond Retail

Downtown amenities found in Ames, Story City, and Nevada present a new type of economic generator not typically found in Story County: commercial office space. These downtowns have capacity to add low-impact research, light industrial, general office, and back-of-house functions in more compact development, two- to three-story buildings on infill sites. Providing downtown office space expands location choices for Story County businesses, adds Main Street vitality, and enhances opportunity for retail and dining options.

Smaller cities in Story County also have excess land near the main streets and grain elevators. While these smaller areas are not likely to receive multi-story development, they do have the potential to provide amenities for visitors attracted to the agricultural commerce and tourism opportunities in the area.
Growing In versus Growing Out

The Story County Development Plan has a goal to “Protect and preserve Story County’s agricultural resources” and has as an objective to “Implement planning policies to protect farms and farmers from urban influences that inhabit agricultural practices.” Based on CPAT site visits and analysis of aerial photography, there is considerable open and underutilized land resources within the confines of the 15 cities and the four unincorporated towns. Under current trends there is enough urbanized area to accommodate growth in Story County for several decades. By developing on open parcels, redeveloping underused parking areas and renovating empty space in existing buildings within the cities of Story County, the most productive and valuable farmland in the nation can be protected from further encroachment other than modest conversions for a few critical manufacturing uses.

Of equal importance is the reinvestment in the historical commerce centers. These centers add to the character and interest of the County and should be areas where investment is encouraged. These historic settlements give a sense of history and provide citizens with nearby services. The historic settlements can also be places for tourism-based businesses, such as small museums (i.e. historic gas station in Colo), bed and breakfasts, cafes and fresh food markets in America’s most valuable farmland.

Story County prides itself on “(a) rural/small town lifestyle with easy access to urban amenities.” Over the years, most of the Story County cities have lost business activity and services that provided residents of the rural parts of the County.
Shadow platting is a way of expressing the long term development potential of a site. It is a map, drawn in an early development phase, showing areas of a property that can receive additional buildings or increased density over time. The method is typically used to ensure efficient use of property by locating initial buildings and/or surface parking lots so as not preclude infill development on a site.

convenient, nearby urban amenities. By establishing investment zones and policies that direct public investments to the existing urban areas, public services cost less. Private investment typical follows public investment, especially if the public projects reduce service delivery costs or add to the physical attractiveness of the community (i.e. street trees, sidewalks, trails). It is unrealistic to expect a plethora of commercial growth in the rural Story County cities. However, it is expected that some commercial growth will happen with strategic public investments and a growing number of neighboring residents (consumers) seeking the convenience of nearby services. A new small shop in Colo can have comparable economic impact as a large retail anchor in Ames. One development can spur on future developments especially if the development helps an adjacent business or contributes to the overall charm of the community.

To facilitate small town investments, the CPAT recommends zoning audits (for example, see the APA PAS report on Smart Code Audits) be conducted for the zoning codes for the larger cities within the county. Many codes written in the last 50 years have a built-in bias that make infill and mixed-use development difficult or impossible. Rigid use restrictions, minimum parking requirements, large lot sizes, deep setback requirement and maximum building height limits should be critically reviewed with the eye of weeding out burdensome or unnecessary regulations. Communities with successful revitalized towns have made infill, mixed-use, compact development in the context of the community an easy prospect.

Agricultural investments and economic production of farmland should not be overlooked. As Story County and its cities create strategies for taxable development, it will need to be balanced with the preservation of its agricultural economy and heritage. One way of gaining a better balance is to make the most of the land that has already been urbanized.
The County and cities have aging, incomplete, and newly-vacant commercial strip centers and industrial parks. These areas are already primed for development and should be prioritized for future business growth and expansion. Where the value of buildings on the site is lower than the land values, redevelopment should be considered. The County could assist property owners in preparing these sites for new development through pre-permitting, modest grants for predevelopment activities (such as environmental testing, site planning, appraisals), and/or enhancement of infrastructure services. A map of redevelopment opportunities can be developed as an overlay to the commercial and industrial land inventory.

We recommend the County, in partnership with its cities, begin to rethink what constitutes potential development sites within served areas. Oversized surface parking lots, outdoor storage yards and open grass spaces serving no landscaping or natural area function should be further reviewed as potential redevelopment sites.
Future subdivisions or parcelization of land should allow for phased development and arrangement of buildings and parking that does not limit long term infill capacity.

Specifically, the ISU Research Park currently has some users that could fit into an urban office environment. We recommend the County work with Ames and the Research Park to explore in-town opportunities for future expansion, in addition to considering infill opportunities on the Research Park site.

Image 21: ISU Research Park layout
Source: ISU Research Park website

Image 22: ISU Research Park Future Development Opportunities
Source: ISU student-produced map for CPAT
Park less, build more.

A number of the local zoning ordinances have excessive minimum parking requirements or simply have an overabundance of existing parking. Too much parking detracts from the community’s character and unnecessarily occupies land that could be put to better use. Excessive parking requirements also make business operations more expensive, using resources on pavement that might be better invested into a durable building or other aspects of the business. Impenetrable parking surfaces can exacerbate flooding and raise insurance costs and business risks. By reducing or eliminating parking requirements, new opportunities for infill development are made in the urban area, use of existing infrastructure is maximized and growth pressures infringing into prime agricultural lands are lessened.

Downtown Ames and the unincorporated areas of Story County have no minimum parking requirements. Story County has taken parking regulations one-step further by instituting maximum parking space requirements. Eliminating minimum parking requirements and setting limits on the maximum amount of off-street parking along and near main streets will help to promote a more compact, walkable form of urban environment. CPAT recommends the local parking regulations for mixed-use, commercial and industrial areas of all the Story County cities be reviewed and adjusted to closely reflect actual parking demands.

Façade Treatments

First impressions can make or break a business; the same goes for communities. The main streets of Story County are the calling cards for business recruitment. They represent the social infrastructure of an area and define the image of economic health in a community: who lives there, what leisure activities are available, and the general pride of place.
Over the decades many storefronts in the downtowns of Story County have been subjected to renovations, some of which have diminished the building’s curb appeal and the usefulness. Many window openings have been reduced in size or blocked up entirely, rendering interior spaces to marginal commercial spaces, storage areas or unused space. The loss of window space has diminished the value of the building for shops, offices and living spaces and gives a visitor and potential investors the impression that the community is in decline and perhaps unsafe.

For a successful retail area that is pedestrian friendly, windows are a key element. Window-shopping is entertaining and invites customers into the building. Windows also allow for “eyes on the street” which gives a sense of safety. Window replacement is expensive; however the payback can be significant. The cost of thermal, energy efficient windows can be offset partly with lower energy costs. There may be opportunities available through local utilities, state or federal agencies for rebates and incentives for window replacement or upgrades. Replacing block up openings with windows will make the building more attractive and interesting which in turn will command higher rents and make the building more marketable for potential tenants.

CPAT recommends that the larger Story County cities conduct a façade study, at least for the primary commercial block of the community. Using the skills of the Iowa State University architectural students the cost of study can remain low while engaging local university students. We also recommend that for a quick start Story County sponsor a façade painting program in any downtown that wants to take advantage. Clean, fresh facades can make an enormous different in the sense of place and build local pride. Story County could offer staff coordination and pay for paints if and only if volunteers came forward to do the actual work and the area to be painted was a significant amount of a downtown. This is a perfect low cost way to leverage county dollars, provide an opportunity for community-building, and make a real change in the feel of downtown.

**Coordinate: Strategic investment plan**

Like many local governments, the County has limited financial resources to devote to economic development activities. Strategic spending is required to increase the effectiveness of investments in growing the tax base. Public roads, parks, trails, open space, and utility systems provide the necessary foundation for economic growth. Currently, the County’s budgeting of improvements for these foundational pieces is fragmented.

We recommend the County immediately get to work on a combined, multi-year strategy for capital investments in infrastructure (a Capital Improvement Program or CIP), that reaches beyond the County Engineer’s 5-year road plan. The Board of Supervisors should create criteria for the CIP that aim to address economic development goals, in addition to the traditional needs of health, safety and welfare. Department work programs should be coordinated to the CIP and the multi-year plan updated annually. The Planning Commission and its staff typically serve as the administrator or at least a partner of a CIP and also provide needed research and plans in preparation for capital projects.

Once the County has its CIP, it should work with its partners for agreement on targeted growth areas that will require expanded or enhanced utilities (electricity, natural gas, water, wastewater, and internet connections) within the five-year timeframe. It should also be coordinated with County-
authorized financial incentive programs. This combined strategic investment plan must be keenly focused on spurring development that will catalyze additional private investment in the area.

**Leverage**

Nearly all major economic development taking place around the country is a product of public/private partnerships. Local examples of these partnerships exist in Story County. Most recently the City of Nevada and its economic development council joined forces with Lincoln Way Energy to provide necessary infrastructure and technical assistance with permitting. At a different scale, the City of Ames has been engaging in partnerships with Main Street building owners through the façade improvement program.

The County Board of Supervisors has authority over numerous development financing incentives. Many of the large development activities that have taken place in recent years have cost and revenue implications for the County. The County should be an active partner in preparing incentive packages targeted to desired businesses and growth locations.

The state, cities, and economic development entities are already engaging in these activities. We recommend the County become an active partner with all local organizations and continue building a direct relationship with the Iowa Economic Development Authority to leverage incentive resources.

The County should review its incentive programs with municipalities and the private sector to determine if modifications are necessary to meet the needs of the county’s economic engines. We also stress that the County consider a targeted list of projects through the anticipated tax increment financing district. This new revenue can be a powerful source for advancing the County’s economic development goals, but only if approached strategically and with a focus on catalyzing jobs and high value development.

Appended is a summary of industrial and commercial development incentives offered through the state and county. In addition to the local programs many federal agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, Economic Development Administration, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, have additional funding programs that can be matched to local efforts. The Iowa Economic Development Authority should be a primary resource to identify and further understand relevant federal programs.

**Negotiated Agreements**

Critical to opening up sites for development is finding municipal agreement on long term governance, who will bear the costs to build and maintain infrastructure, and how revenues flow from the new tax base. Most communities formalize expectations for property through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and/or Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs).

Following a visioning plan and discussions about growth strategies with its partners, the County should proceed with developing agreements. These negotiated agreements should specify how much each partner pays for infrastructure, who is responsible for new improvements, and how the tax and fee revenues will be apportioned.
Trails and recreation

Recreation activities in Story County contribute to the economy and the overall quality of life. Many residents at the stakeholder sessions identified trails as one of the great parts of life in Story County. Trails and recreation improvements are supportive of economic development in the larger metropolitan area and in the smaller cities. The improvements may look different in each area because they support different goals but they are each important components. In Ames and Nevada, paved bike lanes or cycle tracks adjacent to or on city streets are great for commuters and residents. In smaller communities links to regional trail systems provide a destination for visitors. Links to statewide trails, such as the Heart of Iowa, the High Trestle trail and other trail systems connects Story County to a regional trail network that has larger economic and recreation opportunities. Creating a network of interconnected trails that are accessible throughout the County and connect to the greater region is an important component of economic development and sustaining the quality of life.

Economic Impacts of Recreation
Story County Conservation has identified that parks and recreation within the County are contributing at least $18 million to the local economy from permit and user fees. American Trails on behalf of Iowa 2000 Trails (www.americantrails.org/resources/economics/IAecondevel.html) found that:

...for every new dollar spent by trail users in your community (by tourists, or as avoided leakage) all local government entities will probably realize increased revenues totaling between 30 and 50 cents after the completion of all rounds of economic activity, and including all inter-government transactions....Rural areas offering products entailing a great deal of local production labor (e. g., crafts) can also experience higher multipliers.

Throughout stakeholder meetings, participants identified benefits from trails and the large numbers of users that take advantage of the Heart of Iowa and High Trestle trails. A regional trail network including linkages from existing trails and metropolitan areas can spread the wealth. A connection...
or spur trail from the Heart of Iowa north from Collins to Zearing could create a loop trail. This has the advantage of including small communities in the eastern portion of the County. These communities may realize real economic benefits from a new trail.

Small, targeted efforts in the eastern portion of the County cause real impact in those communities. These trail links in eastern Story County may lead to a new café or bed and breakfast—one small business can make a significant impact. A network of trails that connect to regional trail systems positions Story County as part of a recreational destination and is recommended. We also recommend tourism and alternative attractions be considered as part of a trails master plan. A trail network that links to wineries, historic barns, recreation centers, and community features attracts a diverse range of users. These types of unique recreation opportunities should be part of what Story County is known for, serving to draw residents and visitors and reinforce the quality of life that is already enjoyed here.

Quality of life
Participants at the stakeholder sessions were passionate about the excellent quality of life in Story County. Residents choose to live here and visitors come to visit, in part, because of the recreational opportunities. A network of trails and bike lanes can be used as a marketing tool for quality of life. An interconnected bicycle path system also serves as an alternative transportation network. Bike lanes can connect cities or link neighborhoods within cities, facilitating better transportation and a bike friendly community. Opportunities for a diverse range of recreational opportunities appeal to diverse age ranges from retired couples to young families. Maintaining and enhancing the quality of life in Story County keeps residents and recent graduates in the County while, at the same time drawing new residents and visitors.

Trails are particularly useful because they provide a free or low-cost recreational amenity while creating many opportunities to expose the advantages your community offers as a business location to people. Furthermore, trails reinforce your community’s desirability as a place to live and work to current residents and employees. American Trails for Iowa 2000 Trails

The opportunity to connect trails to other feature amenities is unique to Story County and presents an opportunity to showcase the best features of the County. A trail system connected to wineries, microbreweries, local foods, open vistas, waterways and parks could attract a variety of users, utilizing the trail system for wine tasting, biking with children or kayaking. A targeted marketing effort identifying all of the opportunities to connect trails with other amenities could attract visitors and reinforce the superb quality of life that residents enjoy.

Planning
The County has a Conservation Department and a Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Plan that addresses trails and parks. The REAP Plan is an excellent starting point for strategizing the County’s role in recreation improvement and development. Because REAP funding is allocated from the state, the County should consider ways to leverage county and state funding to achieve recreation goals.

Focus on priority areas and goals are essential to funding new recreation or trails. We recommend that the County Conservation Department prepare a Trails/Recreation Master Plan. The Master Plan should identify priority areas for new trails, connections between existing trails and maintenance.
Any plan should include consideration of off-road uses and on-road uses. This may include targeting efforts along major thorough-fares in and between cities that would enable greater bicycling access. Recreation amenities, including parks, trails, bike lanes, water trails and parks should be included and coordinated with the other elements in capital improvements plans (CIP). Inclusion in a CIP ensures that these amenities are included as part of county infrastructure investments.

The appointment of a Trails Commission should be considered. A Trails Commission acts as a review body for the Board of Supervisors and recommends direction and strategy. A Trails Master Plan and Trails Commission can prioritize and direct funding to areas where it will be most effective for Story County economic development. If a Trails Commission is not appointed, the public should be included in identifying recreation and trail priorities. Any planning should be done in consideration of the REAP Plan.

Local Foods
Local foods and farmers are a fantastic resource and economic generator in Story County. There is potential for even greater economic benefits from local foods in Story County. According to a report from the Leopold Institute (“Measuring the Economic Impacts of Increased Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Production in Iowa Considering Metropolitan Demand”):

- Nearly all Story County residents could receive 100% of their produce demand from local farmers
- Potential for $1 million in sales from local produce in Story County
- Opportunities for $3.3 million in retail sales
- Three new businesses from local food production and sales
- 19 new jobs from local food production and sales

Story County Supervisors passed the Local Foods and Farms – Strategic Action Steps on October 25, 2011. The Action Steps are an excellent starting point for incorporating local foods into the economic development strategy. We recommend continued efforts to include local foods in the broader economic development and long range plans and working with
local farmers to support their efforts to sell and market their products to local consumers. Local foods, wineries, microbreweries, tourism and recreation can all be intertwined as part of the quality of life and attraction for Story County. Opportunities to link local foods to existing and new trails should be explored, along with connection to wineries and breweries.

Energy Efficiency
Energy efficiency is a great opportunity for Story County residents and businesses to save money. Efficient building design and construction, efficiency upgrades and retrofits are available for residents to improve the energy performance of their homes or features in their homes, while also saving money over the long term. When residents save money over the long term through efficient design and construction practices, the money can be kept in their pockets and spent in the local economy. More efficient buildings, equipment, and manufacturing systems mean more resources are available for reinvestment and expansion in the county. Lower utility bills also allow greater local discretionary spending.

The adoption of building codes is instrumental in achieving energy efficiency; we strongly recommend that Story County adopt building codes. Building codes include energy codes and have standards for windows, insulation and other design and construction elements that are critical to energy performance. Building codes may also reduce insurance premiums for owners and provide assurance to buyers and sellers that the product they are buying and selling is safe and efficient.

Building code enforcement and permitting is typically a self-funding program. Fees for permitting and inspections generate revenue to cover staffing costs. In consideration of the number of new buildings that are constructed in the County, it makes the most sense to contract with a local entity for inspection services. A contract for services could be executed with one of the municipalities, with the department that coordinates zoning approvals also coordinating this service to keep the process as streamlined as possible.

Story County has led the charge for energy efficient upgrades with its facilities upgrades and retrofits. We recommend a unified marketing campaign to address energy efficiency for all residents and businesses with information about rebate and incentive programs. Programs targeting existing buildings, new appliances or equipment, and weatherization are available at the federal and state level and through local utilities. Story County should serve as a central clearinghouse for energy efficiency programs and rebates. Often the biggest hurdle is getting the information to residents and business owners so they know what is available. Rebate and incentive programs are beneficial because they reduce upfront costs of upgrades while saving the consumer even more money over the long term.


Renewable Energy
There is significant investment in Story County in renewable energy with the wind farm and ethanol plant. Continued support of these types of uses will position the County as a hub for renewable energy development.
The County currently allows installation of non-commercial Wind Energy Conversion Systems (WECS) in agricultural districts (A-1, A-2, A-R). Revision of the Land Development Regulations to allow for installation of WECS in residential and commercial areas to serve localized, small-scale energy needs (i.e. domestic) is recommended. Energy independence allows residents and business owners greater choice with their financial savings. It would be prudent to review setback requirements and other issues that may differ in residential areas.

Current County regulations address solar orientation of lots in developments but do not specifically address the allowance of solar fields or solar panels. To facilitate additional renewable energy development it would be best to identify if and how solar energy is allowed and on what basis. There may be opportunities for commercial installation of solar fields or residential use of solar panels. We recommend that these both be specifically addressed in the Land Development Regulations and should be similar to the regulations for WECS. Similarly, solar energy installations should be permitted on small-scale domestic levels in agricultural, residential and commercial districts. Larger, commercial operations of “solar fields” should be reviewed for inclusion in the agricultural, commercial and industrial districts.

County Organization and Staffing
Story County is at a crossroads for their involvement with economic development. Visioning, long range planning and goal-setting are the first steps in the process to being involved and proactive. To support these efforts and the CPAT strategic actions recommended herein, we propose restructuring within the County for:

- Providing assistance to local cities
- Renaming Story County Planning and Zoning Department to Story County Planning and Development (which has already been approved and goes into effect on January 1, 2012)
- Reorganizing Story County Planning and Development and Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Adjustments
- Streamlining the application and review process
- Providing public access to the County’s economic development services
- Adding one new FTE staff to manage implementation of the economic development strategy

The County is uniquely positioned to not only coordinate with local municipalities but provide technical assistance when necessary. Story County should seek out partnership opportunities with local cities and its economic development organizations. These partnerships will differ in scope depending on the community but they are critical to the success of the County as a whole. Some partnerships may be advisory or supportive while others will require a more active role by the County in terms of staff or elected officials. These partnerships can enable communities to leverage their power for greater resources. Cooperative grant applications and project management are an effective way to leverage more money from funding sources.

Small municipalities, especially those with limited staff resources would benefit from assistance from County staff. The cities currently seek technical advice from County planning staff. These services can be expanded to include a full suite of planning and development services, GIS, and infrastructure advisement. Story County should provide leadership and timely assistance to the communities within its boundaries. Services may be provided on a limited, free basis for some activities while long-term service agreements may be executed for others. The opportunity to offer
free or contracted services enables Story County to provide a unique and timely service to all of its constituents.

As the economic development strategy for Story County evolves it is critical that there be staff that can act as the point of contact for Story County government. There are multiple entities working within the county and the region addressing economic development, which combined with a variety of program offerings, can be overwhelming. The Story County staff contact should have access to information, resources and contacts in the area to be ready to assist customers. The staff person is not suggested to usurp authority from other agencies; it is to act as an ombudsman for customers and partners. It was clear from our stakeholder meetings that many groups are working toward the goal of economic development but the County itself does not have significant involvement. It is important that, as part of the economic strategy, staff be well versed in local resources, develop relationships with businesses and industry, and act as a customer service agent for economic development.

Reorganization of planning is an important part of the process. The renaming of the Story County Planning and Zoning Department to Story County Planning and Development, which goes into effect on January 1, 2012, more accurately reflects the work and goals of the department and the County. This new department name better identifies it and Story County as inclusive of development efforts. Along with a name change, the department should develop a mission statement reflective of the modern responsibilities of the department.

Part of the economic development strategy we’re recommending is streamlining the development review process at the County level. In addition to proposing adoption of a centralized county building code, we recommend merging the Board of Adjustment and Planning and Zoning Commission. We understand that this is a longer term action and one that requires state legislative approval, but it is the right direction to move in. Two separate board review processes is onerous, time consuming and unnecessary. Staff has the capacity and knowledge to make a recommendation to one decision making board. Merging of the two boards will also reduce staff time that is necessary to support two separate boards. The reorganized body should also be renamed to reflect the departmental name change (i.e., Planning and Development Commission).

A single point of contact at the County for applicants streamlines the process and makes it customer friendly. The contact person at the County should have access to all related departments and review bodies and assist the customer through the appropriate processes. This has the dual effect of easing customer apprehension with the process and facilitating inter-departmental cooperation.

As the final component of the County staffing recommendation, we recommend that additional staff be added (one FTE) to address the economic development strategy. The function of this position would be:

- Coordinate County economic development efforts
- Partnership development with cities and businesses
- Create and manage a strategic investment plan
- Support downtown revitalization efforts
- Support for small city planning and grant writing
- Resource development for improvements that add to the quality of life in Story County.

Budgets are tight but to further the economic development goals of the County, it is critical that
there be a staff person dedicated to the task. With inadequate staff resources, economic
development efforts will be thwarted, funds wasted, and grants and leveraging opportunities lost.
Nurturing partnerships with communities, economic agencies and other industry groups is an on-
going process requiring staff who can focus on that goal.
CONCLUSION
Strategic investments, partnerships, leveraging, and building the quality of life are some of the crosscutting themes of our recommendations.
Story County’s cities and economic development commissions do a fabulous job of attracting and retaining research, development, and manufacturing enterprises and facilitating new locations for local non-retail businesses. Other entities, such as the Ames Main Street Cultural District focus more narrowly on small businesses and downtowns.
Story County has an opportunity to support economic development efforts. However, using limited resources strategically is critical. Efforts that support small cities, quality of life, preserved and enhanced downtowns, an expanded trails network, and that leverage large economic development engines and outside investments are essential.
Some projects will convert productive farmland, and this will be necessary for an integrated economic development program, but farmland conversions should not be automatic. Job and economic growth alternatives should be balanced with consideration of the value of agricultural production, its related businesses and Iowa’s farming legacy.

Summary of CPAT Recommendations

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<th>County Action</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
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<td>Quick: 6 months</td>
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<td>Downtown Façade painting program</td>
<td>Coordination and paint if volunteers do the painting</td>
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<td>Symbolic restructuring</td>
<td>Rename planning functions, New planning mission statement</td>
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<td>Community Vision Plan</td>
<td>Kick-off and administer</td>
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<td>Community Vision Plan</td>
<td>Develop plan to communicate vision to Story County residents, businesses and visitors. Vision should be thread that ties everything together and defines future strategic planning.</td>
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<td>Coordinated long range plan and city agreements</td>
<td>Following development of Community Vision Incorporate existing plans/strategies such as Local Foods, Climate Change, and Hazard Mitigation, within an overall framework for growth and development of Story County</td>
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<td>Strategic ED Entity Partnerships</td>
<td>Offer service to county ED organizations and chambers</td>
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<td>Economic Gardening program</td>
<td>In partnership with ED entities and following visioning</td>
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<td>Economic Development Audit of County policies and plans</td>
<td>Adjust to align with Community vision and City agreements</td>
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<td>Industrial/commercial land inventory</td>
<td>In close partnership with cities and ED entities Precede long range plan to identify growth and infill opportunities</td>
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<td>Infill development strategy</td>
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<td>Research Park technical assistance</td>
<td>Partnership to assess research park expansion opportunities on existing site County to offer planning or project coordination assistance, with ISU Design School, Ames staff, and Research Park leadership. County is not the lead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoning audits</td>
<td>With agreement of cities, assist with audits of zoning codes to ensure parking requirements are not precluding private investment and mixed use developments are allowed within main commercial areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Downtown façade architectural study</td>
<td>Coordinate with cities and using ISU design students</td>
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<tr>
<td>County CIP</td>
<td>Planning, engineering, and parks/conservation coordinated budget for 2013/14. Develop complete 5-year CIP during the summer/fall of calendar year 2012.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic Investment Plan</td>
<td>Method to formalize implementation of vision, especially growth opportunity areas; this includes coordinating County CIP with planned City capital projects, utility plans, and other anticipated public</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trails Master Plan</strong></td>
<td>Goal to bridge gaps in existing trails, and connect all cities in the county through a trail network</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Establish County Building Code</strong></td>
<td>Includes adoption of building code and organizational program for administration</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Energy Efficiency - Unified Marketing Campaign</strong></td>
<td>In partnership with city staff, ED organizations, ISU, DMACC, develop and implement a marketing and communications campaign.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative Energy Code Audit. Allow WECS in all zoning districts</strong></td>
<td>Review County codes regarding wind and solar energy production. Recommend changes where barriers to installation for localized/personal energy production exist.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Development Coordinator (new position)</strong></td>
<td>Add 1 FTE to support the Board’s increased economic development responsibilities and the steps recommended herein.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Outreach Program</strong></td>
<td>Facilitate partnerships with non-traditional partners (Farm Bureau, Community Foundation, etc.). May be part of Economic Development Coordinator position but facilitation could begin for position is developed.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combine P&amp;Z with BOA</strong></td>
<td>Streamline development review. Legislative changes to the Iowa Code required. The County will need to develop and pursue action.</td>
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</table>
### Summary of Available Economic Development Incentives

| Type                      | Name                             | Managing authority | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
<p>| Direct financial assistance | Grow Iowa                        | IEDA               | <strong>Grow Iowa Values Financial Assistance Program</strong> serves as the funding source for projects that are focused on job creation or retention, value-added agriculture and entrepreneurial efforts. Funding must go toward development including construction, site acquisition, equipment, fixtures. Eligibility restricted to locally-based companies, job creation with wage and benefit requirements, and verification of local need (applicable only to federal funding). Financial assistance of up to $250,000 and technical assistance up to $25,000. |
| Direct financial assistance | Demonstration Fund               | IEDA               | Loans, forgivable loans, and grants of up to $150,000 to encourage commercialization activities by small and medium-sized Iowa companies targeted industries. 50% match required; match cannot come from other state funding. The primary purpose is to help businesses with a high-growth potential reach a position where they are able to attract later stage private sector funding. |
| Direct financial assistance | Iowa Self-Employment             | IEDA               | Helps qualified individuals with disabilities establish, acquire, or expand a small business by providing technical and financial assistance. Technical Assistance of up to $10,000 for business development activities. Financial Assistance of up to $10,000 for start-up expenses such as equipment, supplies, rent or acquisition costs. Assistance cannot exceed $10,000 and applicants must provide 50% of the of the equipment or working capital. |
| Direct financial assistance | Iowa Equity Funds                | Varies             | Seed capital funds, established and administered locally. Offered for specific areas, such as the Ames Seed Capital Fund, or specific industries, such as the Iowa Corn Opportunity Fund. Access a listing and contact information through the IEDA.                                                                                                                                          |
| Direct financial assistance | Targeted Small Business Program  | IEDA               | Loans and grants to help create and expand businesses owned/operated by person of a minority group, a woman, or a disabled person. Up to $50,000 loan to start or expand a business. Up to $50,000 grant for equity to leverage bank financing.                                                                                                                                                   |
| Infrastructure and remediation assistance | Infrastructure Component | IEDA               | Financial assistance, through loans, forgivable loans and cost indemnification agreements, for capital-intensive infrastructure projects that create quality, high-wage jobs and demonstrate a statewide impact. Iowa municipalities and businesses are eligible. |
| Infrastructure and remediation assistance | Infrastructure Component | IEDA               | Financial assistance, through loans, forgivable loans and cost indemnification agreements, for capital-intensive infrastructure projects that create quality, high-wage jobs and demonstrate a statewide impact. Iowa municipalities and businesses are eligible. |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Infrastructure assistance</strong></th>
<th><strong>CDBG Public Facilities Set-Aside</strong></th>
<th><strong>IEDA</strong></th>
<th><strong>The PFSA program provides financial assistance to cities with less than 50,000 in population and to counties for public infrastructure improvements that enable businesses to create new job opportunities. Projects that will create manufacturing jobs, add value to Iowa resources and/or increase out-of-state exports are given priority. Eligible projects include adding or improving sanitary sewer systems, water systems, streets, roads, and storm sewers.</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Street Iowa</strong></td>
<td><strong>IEDA</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commercial district revitalization: 4 point approach-includes economic business improvement, design, organization, and promotion. Coalition of main street stakeholders must be formed prior to applying.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tax credit</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family farm</strong></td>
<td><strong>County Board</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tax credit for family-run farms. Applies to school district-levied property taxes, in excess of $5.40/$1000 of assessed value. Application available annually, with automatic renewals for a maximum of five years.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tax credit</strong></td>
<td><strong>Brownfield / Grayfield</strong></td>
<td><strong>IEDA</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tax credits for qualifying Brownfield and Grayfield projects. Additional credit for use of green building standards. First come first served basis, of up to $500,000 per project and $5,000,000 for each fiscal year.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tax credit</strong></td>
<td><strong>Endow Iowa</strong></td>
<td><strong>IEDA</strong></td>
<td><strong>State tax credit equal to 25% of a qualifying gift to a community foundation; maximum annual credit is $100,000 (on a $400,000 gift). The gift must be to an endowment fund within the qualified foundation. The tax credits can be claimed by individuals, businesses, or financial institutions. Many local communities have established eligible funds through the Story County Community Foundation. The foundations make grants to local organizations that support the betterment of Story County. Nineteen grants in 2010 included City of Gilbert park improvements and assistance to Heartland Senior Services.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tax credit and Exemption</strong></td>
<td><strong>High Quality Jobs</strong></td>
<td><strong>IEDA</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tax credits, exemptions, and/or refunds to off-set the cost incurred to locate, expand or modernize an Iowa facility . Non-retail and non-service business and must meet wage/benefits requirements. Assistance could include 100% property tax exemption on new improvements, tax credit on qualifying investment, and refund of sales/service tax paid to contractors for new improvements.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tax exemption</strong></td>
<td><strong>Industrial</strong></td>
<td><strong>County Board</strong></td>
<td><strong>Property tax exemption for increased value of industrial real estate, warehouses, distribution centers and research/service facilities. Direct exemption from County Board of Supervisors. Phased exemption from 75% exemption of added value in first year to 15%,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax exemption</td>
<td>Cattle facilities</td>
<td>County Board</td>
<td>Property tax exemption for increased value of owner-operated cattle facilities. Direct exemption from County Board of Supervisors. Phased exemption from 75% exemption of added value in first year to 15%, over five years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tax exemption</td>
<td>Solar</td>
<td>County Board</td>
<td>Property tax exemption for property with wind power generation. Phased exemption for up to 20 years or full exemption for 5 years, at Board of Supervisors discretion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEET THE TEAM

Team Leader

Wayne Feiden, FAICP
Wayne has 30 years planning experience in land use, community revitalization, sustainable transportation, and open space, and the environment. He helped lead Northampton to earn the highest score in Massachusetts scoring of municipal sustainability efforts, an APA Great Streets award, and designation as a Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists. Wayne also has a small consulting practice, and serves as an adjunct faculty at the University of Massachusetts and Westfield State University. Wayne’s publications include three American Planning Association’s PAS Reports, most recently Assessing Local Government Sustainability. Wayne has participated on or led 16 expert panels and design charrettes around the country. He has international experience in Hungary (Eisenhower), South Africa (Fulbright) and New Zealand (Fulbright). Wayne holds a Master’s in City and Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina and a BS in Natural Resources from the University of Michigan. He has earned the American Trails’ Trails Advocacy Award, Honorary Western Mass AIA, and APA-Massachusetts Chapter Distinguished Planner and Advocacy Planning Awards.

Deb Meihoff, AICP
Deb Meihoff brings eighteen years experience with redevelopment and revitalization planning, especially focused on implementation strategy and public participation for economically distressed urban and suburban communities. Her consulting firm has completed more than 40 community development and redevelopment plans for local governments and developers around the Pacific Northwest, with a focus on neighborhood redevelopment, public/private partnerships, redevelopment financing, and public process. Current projects include suburban downtown revitalization plan, model code for urban infill and transit-oriented development, strategic investment plan for mixed use, first-ring corridor, and financial incentives for industrial jobs/economic development. Prior to opening Communitas, Deb was project manager for the Portland Development Commission, Portland’s economic development and redevelopment agency. Deb holds a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of New Orleans and a BA from the University of Colorado.

Catherine Pagano, AICP CEP
Catherine Pagano brings 10 years of experience as a rural community planner with special knowledge of sustainable and energy planning as it relates to rural communities and regional energy efficiency plans. Her work includes focus on planning guidelines and regulatory framework for mitigating natural hazards. Prior to working for Gunnison, Catherine worked for the US Forest Service, first as a recreation and forestry specialist and then as a hydrology and forestry specialist. Catherine holds a Masters in Environmental Policy and Management from the University of Denver and a BA from the University of Colorado.
Russell Soyring, AICP
Russell Soyring brings over 30 years of experience in local government and regional planning. Most of that time he has served as Planning Director in Traverse City, helping earn that City an American Planning Association Great Streets award and designation as a Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists. He has played a leading role in helping to revitalizing Traverse City. Russ was past president of the Michigan Association of Planning and continues to work in efforts outside of his community to address planning challenges. Russ holds a Masters in Regional Planning from the University of Michigan and a Bachelors in Resource Development from Michigan State.

Thomas Bassett, Program Associate, American Planning Association
Thomas Bassett works on many projects including the Community Assistance Program and International Outreach. He is part of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas team. He has participated in planning projects in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Germany, South Africa, and the United States. His published work appears in The South African Geographical Journal and URBAN, as well as a forthcoming article in Latin American Perspectives. Tom holds an MS in Urban Planning from Columbia University, and an AB in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies from Brown University.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Story County Department of Planning and Development
Charlie Dissell, AICP and Leanne Harter, AICP worked tirelessly to organize on the ground logistics and provide support to the team throughout the project.

The Story County Board of Supervisors
Wayne Clinton, Paul Toot, and Rick Sanders were key supports of the CPAT project, embracing the chance to see how the future role of county government

Iowa State University Student Graphics and Research Assistance
The maps and plans in this report were prepared by students in the Department of Community and Regional Planning, Iowa State University. Our sincerest thanks are due to:
• Douglas M. Johnston, PhD, Professor and Interim Director, ISU Department of Community and Regional Planning--student volunteer coordination and work space.
• Del Amsden, Kate Dirks, James Hickey, Amanda Jacobsen, Taylor King, Anuprit Minhas, Shelley Oltmans, Shawn O'Shea, Jennifer Roberts, Jill Smith, Evan Todz, Annie Thompson, Jesse Thornsen, ISU Community and Regional Planning students--graphics and research

Thanks to CPAT interns Rich Saunders and Ryan Hall for their work in assembling materials for the project.

All images are by Wayne Feiden, FAICP and Russell Soyring, AICP unless otherwise noted.
Annotated Bibliography
(Source: Iowa State University Department of Community and Regional Planning students.)


Information regarding available incentives and rebates for renewable energy in Iowa.

Information from federal government regarding efficiency rebates and incentives.


The thesis report briefly explores the role of tourism in economic development and outlines a guide for developing a tourism route along the historic Lincoln highway in the State of Iowa. It offers a comprehensive tourism strategy promoting the linkage of all communities along the highway.


The document is a combination of two comprehensive plans for the cities of Collins and Maxwell, Iowa, developed by the students of Community and Regional Planning through an IDRO project at Iowa State University. The report contains information about the planning process adopted in both cities, information about the communities and their school districts and general recommendations for school districts in addition to detailed comprehensive plans for both cities.


The report is an update of the original Comprehensive Development Plan for Story City Iowa. The update was done in four phases – Goals and Objectives, Background and Inventory, Comprehensive Development Plan and Policies and finally Plan Implementation – Codes and Ordinances.

CRP-ISU. 1990. Slater – 1990 and Beyond. IDRO-ISU

This is a mini plan for the town of Slater, Iowa developed by the students at Community and
Regional Planning department at Iowa State University. It is a very old plan and may or may not be useful in the current stage.

CRP-ISU. 2008. Story City, Iowa: Concept Development Plan. IDRO-ISU

The students at CRP-ISU developed a Concept Development Plan for Story City, IA as part of the Planning for small towns class of Fall 2008. The plan looks into aspects of story city that can re—create and strengthen the character, identity and uniqueness of the town through recommendations like changes in signage, sidewalk and pedestrian infrastructure improvements, story city logo, entry way and corridor improvements, landscaping, design guidelines, implementation strategies and identify potential funding sources.


The students from Community Planning Studio of Fall 2007, at CRP ISU developed the comprehensive plan for the City of Roland.


The report is a compilation of comprehensive plans developed for the cities of Colo, McCallsburg and Zearing besides a development plan for the Colo-NESCO Community School District.