

01

INTRODUCTION & PLANNING PROCESS

01

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The City of Elkhart, Iowa is uniquely positioned between the business and employment hubs of Ames and Des Moines. Due to its location outside of each metropolitan area, Elkhart provides a small town feel, a high quality of life and easy transportation to access major employment centers. This proves promising for growth, and as a result, this City identified a need to update their Comprehensive plan to provide a unified vision among community members, elected officials and partners to plan for future orderly growth.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Elkhart's Comprehensive Plan is the City's foundational policy document that will guide growth and development for the future. As City officials look ahead, the Comprehensive plan will provide clear, workable recommendations and serve as a framework for development. The plan should inspire, guide and direct the growth of Elkhart while being sensitive to existing residents and businesses.

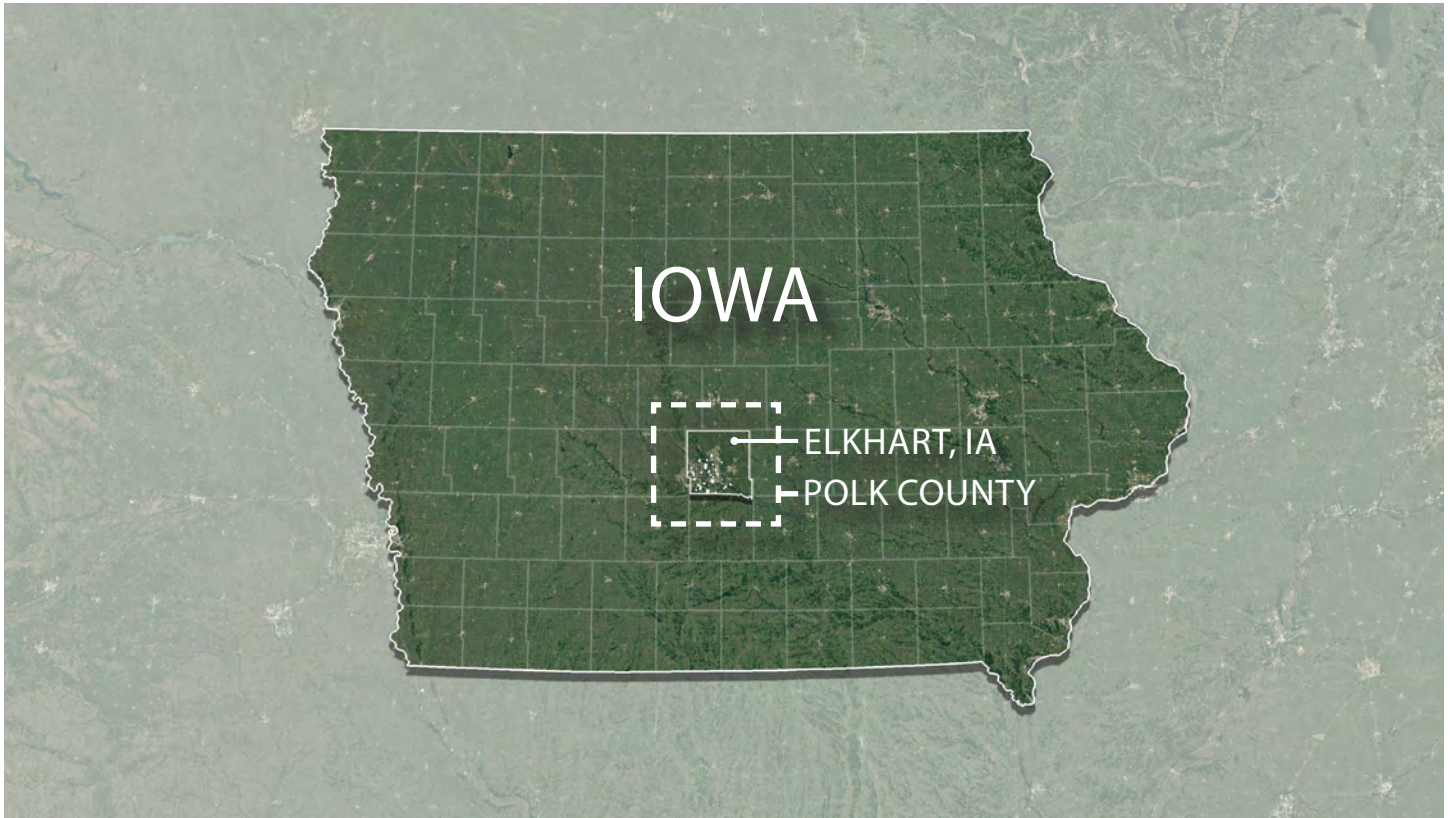
The Comprehensive Plan is the basis for City Zoning regulations, as required by Iowa Code Chapter 414. The plan aims to provide a clear set of goals and objectives to guide the development of building and zoning requirements.



Vision Statement

“Elkhart will be a family friendly, attractive community that provides high quality services and amenities to its residents and visitors while maintaining a unique identity within the metropolitan area.”

Regional Context



Historically, the City of Elkhart was originally inhabited by Native Americans in 1846. After being settled by Isaac Walker Cory, the area became known as Cory Grove. In July of 1904, the town became known as Elkhart. Today, Elkhart is located in Polk County between Ankeny and Ames, with easy access to the Des Moines Metropolitan Area.

As part of this plan, the ten “Iowa Smart Planning Principles” will be considered.

These Smart Planning Principles encourage growth and sustainability and include the following:

- 1. Collaboration**
 - 2. Efficiency, Transparency and Consistency**
 - 3. Clean, Renewable and Energy Efficient**
 - 4. Occupational Diversity**
 - 5. Revitalization**
 - 6. Housing Diversity**
 - 7. Community Character**
 - 8. Natural Resources and Agricultural Protection**
 - 9. Sustainable Design**
 - 10. Transportation Diversity**
- City of Elkhart, IA | Comprehensive Plan

**IOWA
SMART
PLANNING**

Local Context



Located just two short miles from Interstate 35 on Northeast 126th Avenue, the City of Elkhart serves primarily as a residential community. Within the City of Elkhart's incorporated area, as much as 84% of the land is undeveloped farmland, providing space for anticipated future growth.

The City's commercial center runs along Main Street between Railroad Avenue and Lincoln Avenue. Residential uses surround the commercial center, as well as east of Grant Avenue.

The City has access to Interstate 35 via the Walnut Street/NE 126th Ave/I-35 interchange. Walnut Street serves as Elkhart's primary access road and runs east/west throughout the city. The primary north/south access road is Grant Avenue. Main Street serves as the city's commercial corridor.

Elkhart is part of the growing North Polk Community School District and takes great pride in the district's accomplishments.



Planning Process



As part of the planning process the project team developed a public engagement plan to encourage active participation, and foster an environment for idea sharing. In order to meet the needs of all residents, the project provided opportunities for public awareness, public education, public input, and public interaction.

The methods for public involvement included the following:

- **Project Website**
- **Community Input Survey**
- **Steering Committee Meetings**
- **Public Open House**
- **Public Hearing**

The image above illustrates the general layout of the project website which can be accessed here:

<https://clients.bolton-menk.com/elkhartcompplan/>

Components of the website include a project summary, which explains what a comprehensive plan is, what the City of Elkhart Comprehensive Plan will address, how the process works, and why the plan is important. This information is explained in detail on the following page.

The project website also included a graphic project schedule to keep residents and interested parties informed and up-to-date on when meetings were planned to be held and when the plan would be taken to City Council.

A section of the website was reserved for documents and meeting information. This included notes, maps, and other key information that was discussed at the steering committee meetings and the public open house.

The last component of the website included a “share input” tab where residents could navigate to take the online community input survey.

Comprehensive Planning Summary

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A Comprehensive Plan defines the vision, goals and aspirations for the long-term development and redevelopment of the community. The plan is intended to shape land use and transportation patterns, conserve natural resources, and identify needs for utilities, housing, parks and open space. The Comprehensive Plan also guides decisions on both public and private investments in infrastructure and facilities.

The City of Elkhart Comprehensive Plan will address the following:

- Land Use
- Housing
- Public Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Natural Resources
- Community Character
- Hazards
- Intergovernmental Collaboration

HOW DOES THE PROCESS WORK?

The intended outcome of the Plan and planning process is the following:

- Engage the public and community stakeholders to discuss the community's long-term desires on subjects including: growth and development, community character, housing and other matters uniquely important to Elkhart.
- Evaluate existing conditions and use available data to identify and set goals to achieve the community's vision.
- Develop an implementation plan to accomplish the identified goals.

WHY IS THE PLAN IMPORTANT?

A Comprehensive Plan provides the basis for land-use, development, and zoning decisions. The plan provides continuity in a community by creating a guiding document available for all to use in making future such as the residents, business owners, elected leaders, and individuals with development interests.

A Comprehensive Plan is a tool that can be used to identify infrastructure and other investment needs. Planning for orderly growth and the necessary utility and transportation extensions can result in the efficient use of resources. Long range planning discourages haphazard development by identifying long-term strategies for compatible land uses and connectivity.

The ability to demonstrate that a community has proactively identified it's future needs and desires is useful and often viewed positively by potential grant funders and programs.

A community that has planned can act more quickly to develop project opportunities while promoting economic development efforts. A comprehensive plan includes valuable information that is useful to firms and companies when making decisions about investments.

Community Input Survey

In addition to the online survey, hard copy surveys were developed and made available to the general public. The following questions were asked on both versions of the survey. Full survey results can be found in Appendix B.1

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the three words you would use to describe Elkhart?
 - a. <20
 - b. 20-30
 - c. 30-40
 - d. 40-50
 - e. 50-60
 - f. 60+
2. What is your age group?
 - a. <20
 - b. 20-30
 - c. 30-40
 - d. 40-50
 - e. 50-60
 - f. 60+
3. Do you live in Elkhart?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. If yes, how long have you lived in Polk County?
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. 1-5 years
 - c. 6-10 years
 - d. Over 10 years
5. What are the three most important reasons you or your family chose to live in Elkhart?
 - a. Proximity to work
 - b. Near friends and/or family
 - c. Cost of homes
 - d. Quality of school district
 - e. Small town feel
 - f. Low crime rate
 - g. Recreational opportunities
 - h. Quality of housing and neighborhoods
 - i. Family friendly
 - j. Raised here
 - k. N/A
 - l. Other (Please specify)
6. How would you rate the overall quality of life in Elkhart?
 - a. Excellent
 - b. Good
 - c. Fair
 - d. Poor
 - e. Not sure
7. Over the next five years, I expect the quality of life in Elkhart will:
 - a. Improve
 - b. Stay the same
 - c. Worsen
 - d. Other (Please specify)

8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement, "The City of Elkhart should plan for and invest in future growth and development to expand the area, population, and economy of the community."
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly disagree
 - e. Not sure

HOUSING

9. What types of housing are needed most in Elkhart?
 - a. Entry-level single-family homes (<Median: \$121,900)
 - b. Mid-level single family homes (>Median: \$121,900)
 - c. Large estate single family homes
 - d. Townhomes
 - e. Apartments
 - f. Condominiums
 - g. Senior housing (Independent and assisted living)
 - h. Senior housing (Skilled nursing care)
10. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement, "The City of Elkhart needs more affordable entry-level single-family housing."
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly disagree
 - e. Not sure
11. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement, "The City of Elkhart needs more multi-family housing options such as apartments, townhomes, condos, or senior housing."
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly disagree
 - e. Not sure
12. What type of dwelling do you live in?
 - a. Single family detached home
 - b. Condominium, duplex, or townhome
 - c. Apartment
 - d. Rural estate or farm home
 - e. Mobile or modular home
 - f. Senior housing
13. Do you own or rent your home?
 - a. Own
 - b. Rent

Community Input Survey (Continued)

14. What areas of Elkhart are well suited for future housing development? (Select all that apply)
- a. Northeast
 - b. Northwest
 - c. Eastern
 - d. Western
 - e. Southeast
 - f. Southwest

LAND USE

15. What type of land uses should future housing be located adjacent to?
- a. Existing Residential
 - b. Commercial
 - c. Mixed-Use
 - d. Public Facilities
 - e. Parks
 - f. Schools
 - g. Industrial
 - h. Other
16. In your opinion, what should the City have more of? (Select all that apply)
- a. Retail options
 - b. Office development and employment opportunities
 - c. Parks, recreation opportunities, and open space
 - d. Sidewalks and trails
 - e. Entertainment opportunities
 - f. Housing options
 - g. Bike lanes/routes
 - h. Preservation of natural resources
 - i. Options for healthcare
 - j. Industrial growth and development
 - k. Other (Please specify)

PARKS AND RECREATION

17. How important are parks, trails, and open space to Elkhart's overall quality of life?
- a. Very Important
 - b. Important
 - c. Indifferent
 - d. Somewhat Important
 - e. Not Important
18. How often do you or a member of your household typically visit a City of Elkhart park, trail, or open space area?
- a. A few times a year
 - b. Once a month
 - c. Once a week
 - d. A couple times a week
 - e. More than three times a week
 - f. We do not visit city parks

19. Why do you visit certain parks more often than others? (Select all that apply)
- a. Proximity to home/work
 - b. Type of equipment/facilities
 - c. Sidewalks/walkable access to the park
 - d. Availability of parking
 - e. Type of activities held
 - f. Other
20. What do you feel the City is lacking in terms of parks and recreation? (Select up to 3)
- a. Trails
 - b. Open space/multi-use areas
 - c. City recreation buildings or community centers
 - d. Outdoor sports fields (soccer, football, baseball, etc.)
 - e. Playgrounds
 - f. Neighborhood and/or community parks
 - g. Park shelters
 - h. Outdoor sports courts (tennis, basketball, etc.)
 - i. Swimming pools
 - j. Outdoor events
 - k. Recreation and education programs
 - l. Other

COMMUNITY FACILITIES & CHARACTER

21. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement "Current park and recreational facilities in the City meet your needs."
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly disagree
 - e. Not sure
22. What community facilities would you like to see/feel Elkhart is lacking?
23. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement "Current public facilities, such as City Hall, the Community Center, etc. meet your needs."
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly disagree
 - e. Not sure

TRANSPORTATION

24. Does the current transportation network meet your needs?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
25. Do the existing sidewalks and trails adequately serve the community?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Community Input Survey (Continued)

26. How beneficial would it be for Elkhart to connect to regional trail systems such as the Neal Smith Trail?
- a. Very beneficial
 - b. Somewhat beneficial
 - c. Not beneficial

27. Do you feel that the properties located south of the Highway are disconnected from the rest of the community?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

28. If you answered yes to the previous question, how do you feel this could be improved?

29. What landmarks or physical elements do you consider to be unique to Elkhart?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

30. Which of the following best describes your current place of employment?

- a. Employed outside the home
- b. Self-employed or work from home
- c. Student
- d. Retired
- e. Unemployed

31. If employed outside the home, where is your place of employment located?

- a. In Elkhart
- b. In Ankeny
- c. In Ames
- d. In other parts of the Des Moines Metro Area
- e. Other (Please specify)

32. In your opinion, how would you describe the availability of employment opportunities in Elkhart?

- a. Plentiful
- b. Adequate
- c. Lacking
- d. Not sure

33. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement "Current retail, commercial, and restaurants in the City meet your needs."

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. Not sure

34. In your opinion, how would you describe the availability of places to shop in Elkhart?

- a. Plentiful
- b. Adequate
- c. Lacking
- d. Not sure

35. How often do you leave Elkhart to shop?

- a. Never
- b. Daily
- c. Weekly
- d. Monthly
- e. At least once per year

36. How often do you leave Elkhart to dine out?

- a. Never
- b. Daily
- c. Weekly
- d. Monthly
- e. At least once per year

37. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement, "Elkhart is a good place to start a business."

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. Not sure

38. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement, "Development of homes or businesses should be limited in environmentally sensitive areas."

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. Not sure

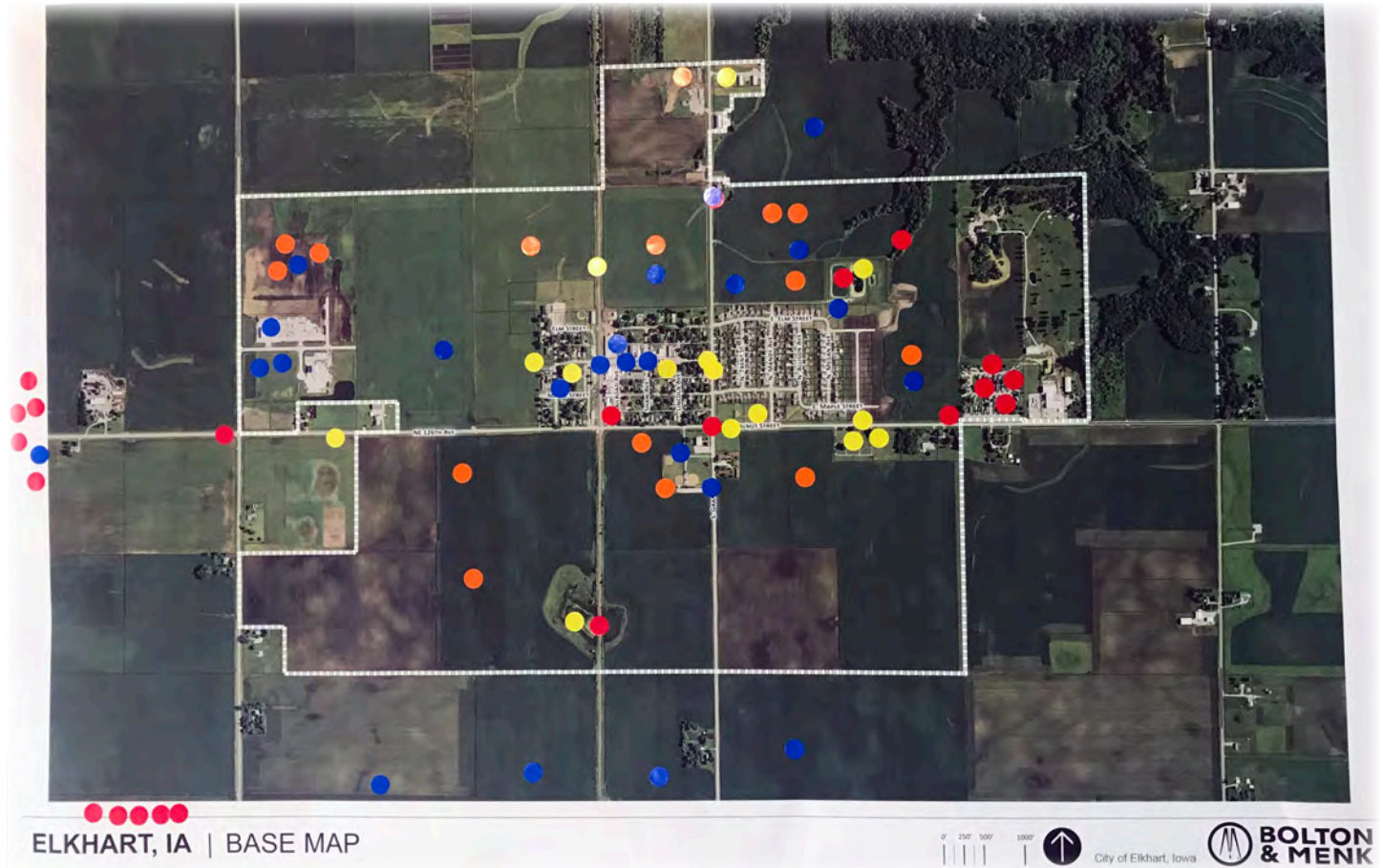
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

39. The comprehensive planning process will include a public workshop(s). Please indicate your level of interest in attending a workshop to discuss the elements of the plan:

- a. Very interested
- b. Somewhat interested
- c. Not sure
- d. Not interested

40. Additional comments or questions?

Steering Committee Meeting 1



A Steering Committee meeting was held on September 24th, 2018 to discuss the comprehensive planning process and obtain input from identified steering committee members. This included City Staff, members of the Parks and Recreation Department, planning commission, representatives from the school district, community betterment committee, Polk county, metropolitan planning organization (MPO), developers, public works, and local business owners and residents.

Meetings with this group aid the planning process by fostering an environment for idea sharing amongst local stakeholders and community members. This meeting served as a “Visioning Workshop” to determine a direction for the Comprehensive Planning effort. As part of this process, the steering committee completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) mapping exercise to identify key areas, features, and aspects of the community.

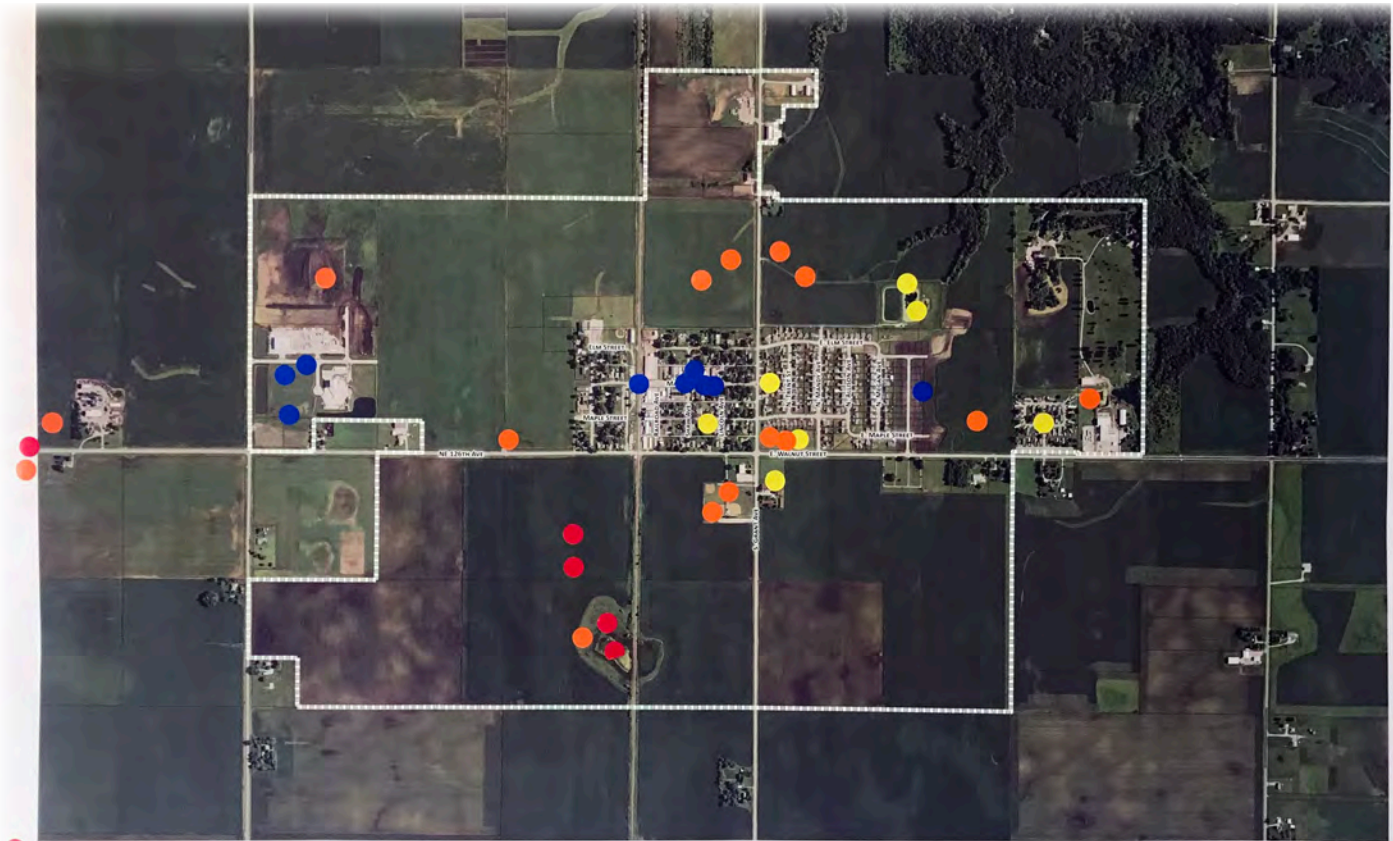
The above SWOT analysis map is one of two that were completed by steering committee members. The second map can be found on the subsequent page. In both instances the results are as follows:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

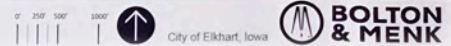
Strengths:

- Main Street and local businesses
- The ability to expand
- Opportunities for linkages
- The new subdivision being developed
- The ability to be proactive and annex land for growth before nearby communities try to acquire the land
- Proximity to the interstate

Steering Committee Meeting 1 (Continued)



ELKHART, IA | BASE MAP



- Geographic location – ease of access between Des Moines and Ames
- Schools/school district and housing

Weaknesses:

- Ball Fields on the South side of town are somewhat disconnected
- Current wastewater system (will be relocated)
- Infrastructure challenges
- Manufactured home park (maintenance concerns/property concerns)
- Industrial uses next to manufactured home park
- Railroad track crossing challenges
- Undeveloped parcels – a current weakness/future opportunity
- Old infrastructure on the South side of town

Opportunities:

- Undeveloped parcels at a key intersection (southern entryway into town)
- Ball Fields – attracting people to the community
- Opportunity to develop the land next to the new subdivision that is being developed
- Expand and redevelop Prairie Pointe Park
- Potential development opportunity on the north side of town

Threats:

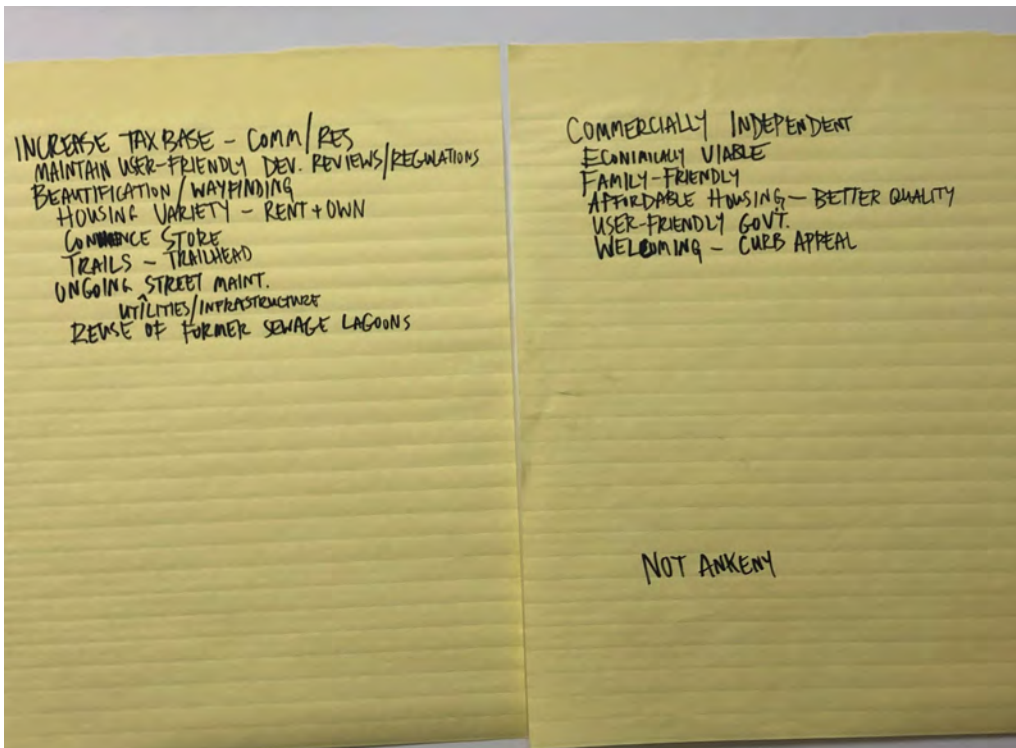
- Interstate – (coming from the West) serves as a challenge as can close with limited control
- Keeping a distinct identity – Unique from Ankeny and other large metro communities
- Mining history – look into mining rights (for zoning, surface rights, and below surface rights)

Steering Committee Meeting 2

The second steering committee meeting was held on February 6, 2019. Committee members reviewed an outline for the document and then reviewed the results of the Community survey. Sixty-five individuals responded to the Community Input Survey. The results can be [found here](#) as well as in the appendix. The committee then focused its efforts on identifying goals/objectives for each topic area for the comprehensive plan.

Goals/Vision:

- Increase tax base – Community/Residents
- Maintain user-friendly development reviews/regulations
- Beautification/Wayfinding
- Housing Variety – Rent & Own
- Convenience Store
- Trails – Trailhead
- Ongoing Utilities/Infrastructure/Street Maintenance
- Reuse of former sewage lagoons
- Commercially independent
- Economically viable
- Family friendly
- Affordable housing – better quality
- User-friendly government
- Welcoming – curb appeal



Steering Committee Meeting 3

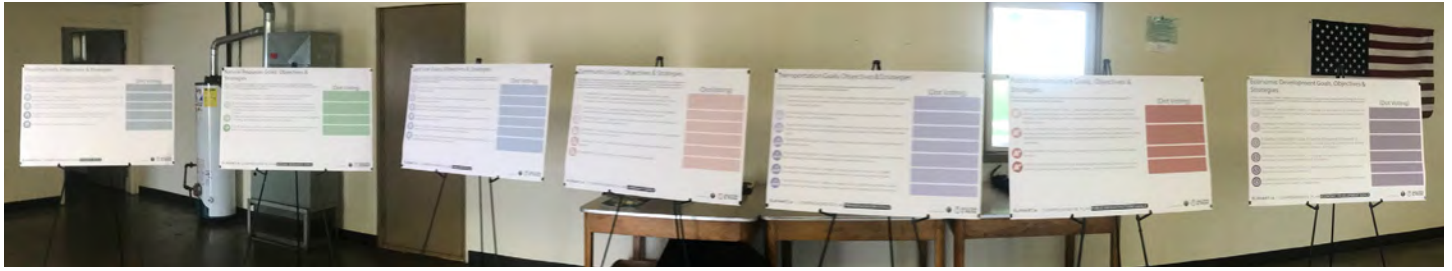
The third steering committee meeting was held on June 5, 2019. Committee members reviewed a draft for the document along with the goals for each section, updating goals as necessary and talking over other major points for the completion of Elkhart's Comprehensive Plan.

During this meeting, maps played a large role in deciding on ideas for parts of the document such as the future land use map and the committee members deciding on how Elkhart will expand in both the near and far future.

Other topics that were covered during the meeting consisted of: future land use, sidewalks and the connectivity of the community, partnerships and economic development, safety of both traffic and pedestrians within and outside the community, goals and the vision statement for Elkhart's Comprehensive Plan.



Public Open House



A joint public open house for the Comprehensive Plan project and the Main Street Improvements project was held on June 19th from 5:30 to 7:30pm at the Veterans Memorial Community Center (264 Garfield Avenue).

At the open house a series of project boards highlighting the goals from each chapter of the Comprehensive Plan were displayed for community members to review and provide input on. Individuals that attended the open house had the opportunity to engage in a dot voting exercise to identify which goals they preferred most or felt fit the community best.

Community members also had the opportunity to view, learn about, and provide input on the Future Land Use map that was developed as part of the comprehensive planning process. A sidewalk improvements map was also displayed at the open house to address and prioritize ways in which Elkhart could become more walkable, pedestrian-oriented, and connected.

Information on the Main Street Improvements project was also made available, as well as comment cards that community members could fill out regarding any questions or comments they may have had regarding either project.

The full results of the dot voting exercise is included in the appendix at the end of this document.



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