

# MASON CITY SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

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The “Wright” Fit

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This Sustainability Plan was created by Master's degree students in the School of Urban and Regional Planning at The University of Iowa as part of the Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities. The students were:

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# Table of Contents

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Acknowledgments	5	<b>Aspirational Cities</b>	29
Executive Summary	9	Greensburg, Kansas	29
<b>1 – INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>12</b>	Branson, Missouri	31
Plan Impetus	13	Dubuque, Iowa	32
Approach & Methodology	14	<b>5 – RESULTS &amp; FOCUS AREAS</b>	<b>35</b>
Vision Statement	14	STAR Sustainability Assessment	36
Focus Areas & Goals	15	Public Outreach	38
What Does Sustainability Mean for Mason City?	16	Focus Areas	44
<b>2 – ABOUT MASON CITY</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6 - OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES &amp; IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>45</b>
History	18	Community Engagement	46
Demographics	18	Prospering Local Economy	48
Economy	19	Social Fairness and Inclusion	52
Tourism	20	Environmental Stewardship	56
Schools	21	<b>7 – CONCLUSION</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>3 – METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>23</b>	A Sustainable Future	62
Sustainability Indicators	24	<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>63</b>
Public Engagement	25	Public Outreach	64
Comparable & Aspirational Cities	26	STAR Community Rating	73
<b>4 – COMPARABLE &amp; ASPIRATIONAL CITIES</b>	<b>27</b>	Secondary Data Sources	80
<b>Comparable Cities</b>	<b>28</b>		
Manitowoc, Wisconsin	28		
Burlington, Iowa	29		

List of Figures

Figure 1: Three pillars of sustainability. Source: Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities. ---- **Error! Bookmark not defined.**6

Figure 2: Location of Mason City in North Central Iowa. Source: Authors. -----188

Figure 3: Mason City Population. Source: U.S. Census. -----188

Figure 4: Mason City and Iowa Comparison. Source: U.S. Census. -----199

Figure 5: The Historic Park Inn. Source: Visit Mason City. ----- 20

Figure 6: 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency. Source: Iowa Department of Education.----- 2121

Figure 7: STAR Communities. Source: STAR. -----244

Figure 8: September Community Outreach Activities. Source: Authors. -----255

Figure 9: Focus Group Meetings. Source: Authors. -----255

Figure 10: Planning Projects Open house. Source: Authors. ----- 266

Figure 11: Comparable and Aspirational Cities. Source: U.S. Census. -----288

Figure 12: Greensburg GreenTown. Source: Greensburg GreenTown.----- 30

Figure 13: Glass Recycling Program of the year Award. Source: Branson 2015 Sustainability Annual Report. ----- 31

Figure 14: Dubuque Historic Millwork District, Redeveloped for Mixed Use. Source: Sustainable Dubuque. ----- 33

Figure 15: Sustainability Assessment Overview. Source: Authors.----- 377

Figure 16: Best Things about Mason City, September Interviews. Source: Authors. -----388

Figure 17: Frustrating Things about Mason City, September Interviews. Source: Authors. -----388

Figure 18: Focus Group Common Themes. Source: Authors. -----399

Figure 19: Focus Group Identified Strengths and Weaknesses. Source: Authors. -----399

Figure 20: Survey Respondents Demographics. Source: Authors. ----- 40

Figure 21: Survey Vision and Identities. Source: Authors. ----- 40

Figure 22: Support for Diversity Inclusion Strategies. Source: Authors. ----- 41

Figure 23: Willingness to support tax incentives for businesses increasing the number of livable wage jobs. Source: Authors. 4141

Figure 24: Support for public arts and cultural facilities. Source: Authors. -----422

Figure 25: Strategies to Support Arts and Cultural Assets. Source: Authors. -----422

Figure 26: Rental Types Preferred to See More Of. Among All, Renters, and Homeowners. Source: Authors. ----- 433

Figure 27: Willingness to Participate in the Sustainability Coalition. Source: Authors.----- 433

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# Executive Summary

The Mason City Sustainability Plan is meant to stimulate conversation and activities that promote sustainability in Mason City. Sustainable communities are those that meet their social, economic, and environmental needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do so as well.

The primary methods used to develop this plan included an assessment of key sustainability indicators in Mason City, public input, and a study of best practices. The process resulted in community goals, objectives, and strategies for implementation that will promote **social fairness & inclusion, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity** in Mason City.

Throughout the planning process, Mason City residents provided insight and expertise that helped shape a vision for the future, reflected in the statement shown below.

### **Mason City Sustainability Vision Statement**

***Mason City will be a statewide leader in sustainability practices with thriving local businesses and employment opportunities for all.***

***The community will work together towards a peaceful, culturally vibrant, resilient and family friendly place.***

Mason City's sustainability vision builds on the strengths of the community: architecture, musical heritage, health and

retail hub, and active community, while addressing the main areas that need improvement, which include better cooperation among stakeholders, creating a more diverse economic base, attracting new residents, and improving resiliency.

The community's vision for a more sustainable future provided a foundation for a set of goals designed to guide future activity. The sustainability goals established for Mason City are:

- 1. To ensure that Mason City has a thriving local economy with livable wages for all.***
- 2. To support collaboration to expand arts and culture, celebrate diversity, and increase educational success.***
- 3. To promote environmental awareness and protect ecosystems and natural areas.***
- 4. To establish a Community Sustainability Coalition that will drive sustainability efforts through education and action, with citizens and public leadership working together.***

The need for collaboration in order for the plan to be successful was a consistent theme among residents and key stakeholders. The plan calls for a Sustainability Coalition to carry out the goals, objectives, and strategies.

The proposed strategies in this plan will serve as guidance for future sustainable development, but are open for changes as the community's needs change. The strategies identified in the plan serve as examples of ways that Mason City can take action to enhance sustainability in the community. However, the list of strategies is not exhaustive. The Sustainability Coalition should continually seek out opportunities to develop and implement strategies that promote sustainability in Mason City.

Successful communities recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and find innovative ways to implement sustainability plans in a cost-effective manner. In Mason City, the opportunities to become recognized as a statewide and nationwide leader in sustainable practices exist in their economic and cultural development.

Major milestones are well within reach to help Mason City demonstrate leadership in sustainability, without having to rely significantly on funding and resources. Flood management and development of bicycle infrastructure stand out as key strengths in Mason City, and can be enhanced with the following strategies:

- ***Enhance flood resilience: Lead formation of a Watershed Management Authority, target sensitive areas along***

***waterways for native vegetation and stormwater best management practices. encourage private landowners to implement stormwater management practices on their property***

- ***Become a recognized national leader in active transportation consistent with Mason City's nationally leading commuting rates: complement trails and bicycle networks with bicycle education, encouragement, and evaluation to attain Bicycle Friendly Community Certification from the League of American Bicyclists.***

Other strategies build on Mason City's reputation as an economic and cultural hub:

- ***Move toward a livable wage through study, recommendations, and incentives.***
- ***Build on strengths in arts & culture: develop an arts & culture plan; integrate public and private arts & culture into the neighborhoods (block parties, little free libraries, etc.)***

The implementation of the Mason City Sustainability Plan relies on the passion and energy of residents combined with city leadership, commitment, and collaboration. As the first ever strategic sustainability plan for the community, it functions as a jump start into new ideas, new challenges, and new opportunities.

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# 1 – INTRODUCTION

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## Plan Impetus

Mason City leaders have recognized the community's potential for working towards a more prosperous and sustainable future. The community built up its strengths in retail and health care services, while celebrating its rich cultural heritage and local artistic and musical assets. Mason City prides itself as the hometown of the Meredith Wilson, creator of *The Music Man*, and rich iconic architecture from illustrious architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Burley Griffin. Mason City is also distinguished as a certified Blue Zone community in acknowledgment of its efforts to support social wellbeing.

However, the city is also facing important social and economic challenges. It has a declining population, reduced manufacturing employment, an unstable downtown shopping area, and is vulnerable to flooding. The community is at a cross-roads to identify opportunities to move forward using sustainability strategies based on the community's needs, cultural assets, and local advantages.

In conjunction with comprehensive plan updates in 2017, this sustainability plan is an initial effort to introduce a sustainability strategic framework to the community. This year-long project, from August 2016 to May 2017, was initiated by the City of Mason City, and developed by graduate students and faculty from the School of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Iowa. The teams working on this sustainability plan and the comprehensive

plan update coordinated throughout the year and provided multiple opportunities for community input and feedback.

The Mason City Sustainability Plan serves as a starting point for the community to begin a conversation and envision a sustainable future. It is a framework for current and future generations, developed based on collaboration with residents, organizations, businesses, and government. The framework builds upon existing local assets and community input to develop goals, objectives, and strategies, and to identify new opportunities for best practices in the areas of social, economic and environmental development.

## Approach & Methodology

Input from Mason City residents informed the contents of the plan. Local input opportunities included personal interviews at the River City Festival in September 2016, eight focus groups with key stakeholders conducted in November 2016, a community-wide survey in February 2017, and a public open house in March 2017. Input gathered from all these activities established a community vision, created social, environmental, and economic goals, objectives, and strategies and was used to identify sustainability indicators that are applicable to Mason City.

Additionally, comparable and aspirational cities were used as benchmarks to understand Mason City's relative sustainability status, and to provide insight into how the city can move toward adopting strategic sustainability practices in the future. The comparable cities were Burlington, Iowa and Manitowoc, Wisconsin. We also conducted case studies of best practices in aspirational cities: Branson, Missouri, Greensburg, Kansas and Dubuque, Iowa.

The STAR (Sustainability Tools for Assessing & Rating Communities) system was used as a reference and to set a baseline for indicators of sustainability in Mason City<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> STAR is a non-profit organization set up by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability,

## Vision Statement

A vision statement helps guide a community toward a unified goal and energizes residents toward action. Three draft sustainability vision statements were developed with input from local residents through interviews and focus groups. The vision statement residents selected through the community survey is shown below.

### *Our Vision*

***Mason City will be a statewide leader in sustainability practices with thriving local businesses and employment opportunities for all. The community will work together towards a peaceful, culturally vibrant, resilient and family friendly place.***

the U.S. Green Building Council, and the Center for American Progress.

## Focus Areas & Goals

Four focus areas address the needs identified through research and public input: **Community Engagement, Prospering Local Economy, Social Fairness and Inclusion, and Environmental Stewardship.** Focus areas identify the overarching components that help realize a vision of sustainability in Mason City. The focus areas align with a holistic approach to sustainability.

Within each of the focus areas, goals specify the community-driven accomplishments to be achieved if the vision is to become real. Goals address the needs of the community and clearly state specific outcomes that can be reasonably expected.

Goals are accomplished through specific strategies, or steps

that help get the community from where we are to where we want to be. The four Mason City Sustainability Goals are shown below.

Strategies developed in this plan serve as examples for the type of activities the community can implement to support sustainability in Mason City. The Sustainability Coalition should continually seek out new strategies that support the overall plan.

Focus areas, goals, objectives, and strategies are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

### **Mason City Sustainability Goals**

*To establish a Community Sustainability Coalition that will drive sustainability efforts through education and action, with citizens and public leadership working together.*

*To ensure that Mason City has a thriving local economy with livable wages for all.*

*To support collaboration to expand arts and culture, celebrate diversity, and increase educational success.*

*To promote environmental awareness and protect ecosystems and natural areas.*

# What Does Sustainability Mean for Mason City?

Sustainability encompasses economic prosperity, social fairness and inclusion, and environmental stewardship, which are inherently interrelated. The need for sustainability extends beyond environmental issues and is essential for addressing complex issues that have far-reaching long-term impacts for the city. Broad governmental and corporate efforts on the daily choices of residents all impact the sustainability of a city and its wellbeing today and in the future.

Mason City seeks to secure a strong future with long term sustainability in mind. Sustainability itself does not add another layer of financial burden and complication to projects, but rather offers opportunities for efficiencies and long term savings. A sustainable economy includes diversified employment opportunities and efficient use of local resources, reducing the vulnerability to economic changes, business closures, and supply chain disruptions.

Severe floods in June 2008 brought environmental resiliency to mind for many residents. Coping with uncertain environmental events, like flooding, often comes at a cost, but also presents an opportunity to incorporate public spaces that benefit the community as recreation while reducing the risk of property damage.

Few other cities in Iowa have adopted sustainability plans. As the city grows in ways that support the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of all residents, Mason City can be on the forefront of community planning and be in a strong position to face future challenges.



## 2 – ABOUT MASON CITY

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## History

Located in North Central Iowa, Mason City is the halfway point between Des Moines and Minneapolis. The city was incorporated in 1870 and serves as the county seat for Cerro Gordo County. The city was a hub for concrete and tile making industries, and regional farmers used tiling to drain local wetlands for agricultural production in the early 20th century. Following World War II, the city continued to be a regional manufacturing and retail hub for north central Iowa. In the past few decades, the city increasingly became a medical hub for North Central Iowa as well.

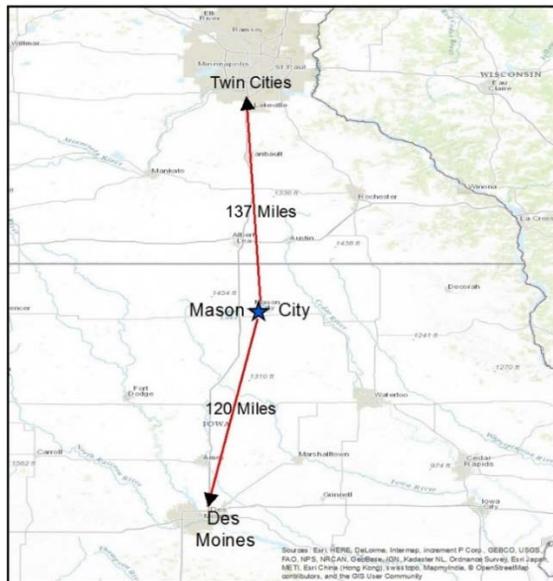


Figure 1: Location of Mason City in North Central Iowa. Source: Authors.

## Demographics

Mason City's population grew rapidly in the early 20th century, reaching a high of over 30,000 residents in 1960. Since then, Mason City's population has been slowly declining. As of 2015, the city was home to 27,366 residents, per Census estimate. This does not mean the population will continue to decline in the future. The city's economic and cultural assets may attract new residents to the city. However, much depends on the course the city will take in the future.

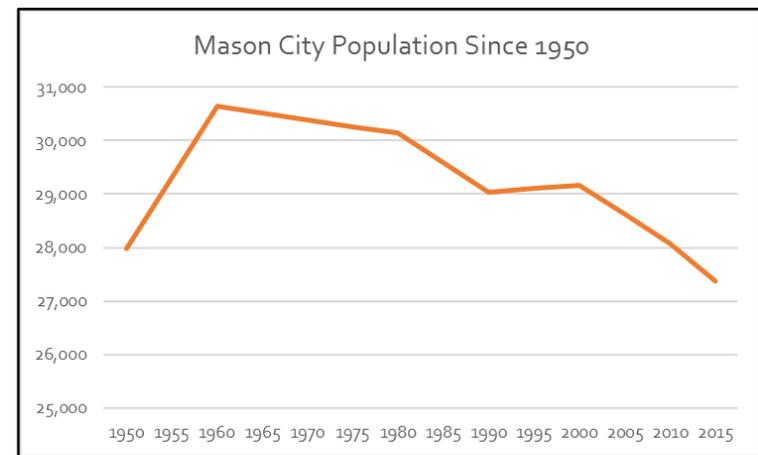


Figure 2: Mason City Population. Source: U.S. Census.

The median age of residents is 42, more than three years older than the median age in the state of Iowa. Almost 18% of the population is over the age of 65, which is three percent higher than the state. The racial makeup of the city is mostly White at 90.7 percent, a Latino population of 4.9 percent and

a small African American population of approximately 2.5 percent. The Latino population grew the fastest, from 3.4 percent in 2000 to 4.9 percent in 2015.

A high percentage (92.3%) of the city's residents over the age of 25 have completed a high school degree, while 20.9 percent of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher. This is a slight decline from 2009, when 21.6 percent of the population held a bachelor's degree or higher. In Iowa as a whole, 26.7 percent of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher. This implies that a large percentage of high school residents entered the workforce directly, or moved out of the city for college and did not return. It is part of a larger trend among smaller communities without bachelor degree granting universities in the Midwest.

	Mason City	Iowa
Median Age	41.9	38.1
Percentage over 65 age	17.9%	15.5%
Median Household Income	\$42,009	\$53,183
Owner Occupied Housing Units	66.6%	71.5%
Percent Below Poverty Line	15.5%	12.5%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	20.9%	26.7%

## Economy

Mason City serves a wide region as a retail and health care hub. The Mason City median household income was \$42,009 according to 2014 Census estimates, which is 79 percent of Iowa's median income. Primary employers in the city are Mercy Medical Center – North Iowa, Kraft Foods, Woodharbor Custom Cabinetry, Mason City Community Schools, and Lehigh Portland Cement. Health care, retail, and manufacturing are the industries employing the most people in the city. According to the 2014 U.S. Census, 7,262 people live and work in Mason City, while 9,892 people commute into the city for work from other places and 4,914 Mason City residents work outside the city.

North Iowa is a very productive agricultural area. Corn and soybeans are the main crops grown in Cerro Gordo County (USDA). Agricultural resources are used in innovations and emerging markets overseas will continue to support North Iowa' agricultural sector. However, the increased scale of farming has lowered the manual labor demand on farms, thus reducing the rural population surrounding Mason City who in the past came to the city for shopping and entertainment. Between 1970 and 2010, the city's population declined by 8.2 percent, while the county's population outside of Mason City declined by 17.2 percent.

Mason City is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest retail market in Iowa, with over 956 million dollars in retail sales, according to the 2012 economic census. However, consumer trends show increases

in online shopping and the consumption of hospitality experiences over retail expenditures. In Mason City, this trend is evident as well, with the opening of craft beer breweries such as Mason City Brewing. Retail and hospitals serve mainly a regional clientele, thus Mason City will need to expand industries that export their products and services beyond the city and region to bring in outside revenues.

## Tourism

During the early 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright and his associates completed several buildings in the community, including the Stockman House, constructed in 1908, and The Park Inn Hotel built in 1910, the only remaining hotel in the world designed by Wright. One of five historic neighborhoods in the city, the Rock Crest & Rock Glen neighborhood is home to the largest group of Prairie Style homes at a single site in the country, with eight homes present. Today, volunteers in the Architectural Interpretive Center next to the Stockman House welcome visitors from around the globe and provide walking tours of the house. The Park Inn Hotel was renovated in 2011 and its 27 hotel rooms, dining and bar facilities are open for business.

Mason City is also the hometown of Meredith Wilson, creator of the musical *The Music Man*. The musical was adapted into a movie in 1962, with the premiere taking place in Mason City. The Music Man Square opened in 2002, which includes a historic streetscape, a museum, two meeting rooms, and recording studios.

In 2014, visitors spent more than \$95 million in Mason City according to a study of the Iowa Economic Development Authority. Visitors spent most their money on transportation costs, food, lodging, and entertainment. A smaller portion is also spent on retail.



Figure 4: The Historic Park Inn. Source: Visit Mason City

# Schools

## Preschool - 12

The Mason City Community Schools serve just over 4000 students in preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The district includes one high school, one alternative high school, two middle schools, and four elementary schools. The community supports the Mohawks at athletic, musical, and cultural events, and the High School is one of the few Juilliard accredited music programs in the nation.

While the city has a minority population of 9.3 percent, the school district has an 18.9 percent minority enrollment for the 2015-16 school year. The 2016 four year graduation rate of 91.4 percent is nearly equal to the statewide average (Iowa Department of Education).

There are two private schools: North Iowa Christian and Newman Catholic Schools. North Iowa Christian is a small school serving approximately 60 children K-12. Newman Catholic School is much larger with an enrollment of over 500 students preschool – 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The cost of tuition for private schools in Mason City in 2016 ranges from \$2,125 to \$4,925 per year and depends on grade level (North Iowa Christian, Newman Catholic Schools).

3rd grade literacy rate has been declining since 2013, and is below the statewide average. In 2015-2016, the rate is 11.7 percent below the statewide average.

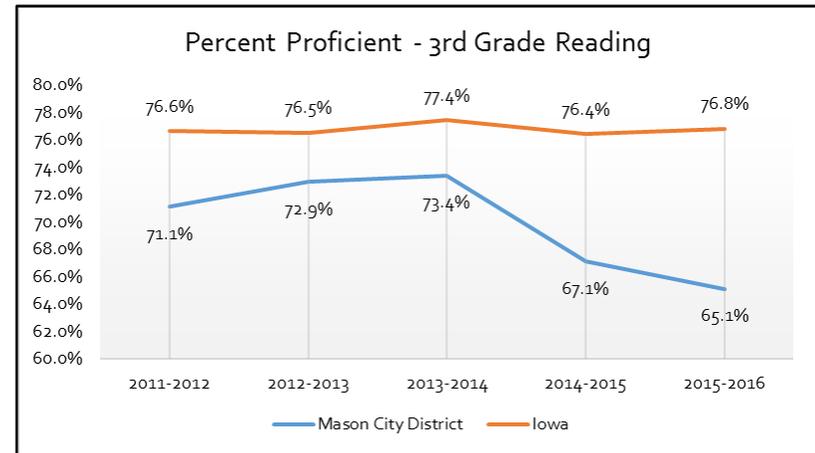


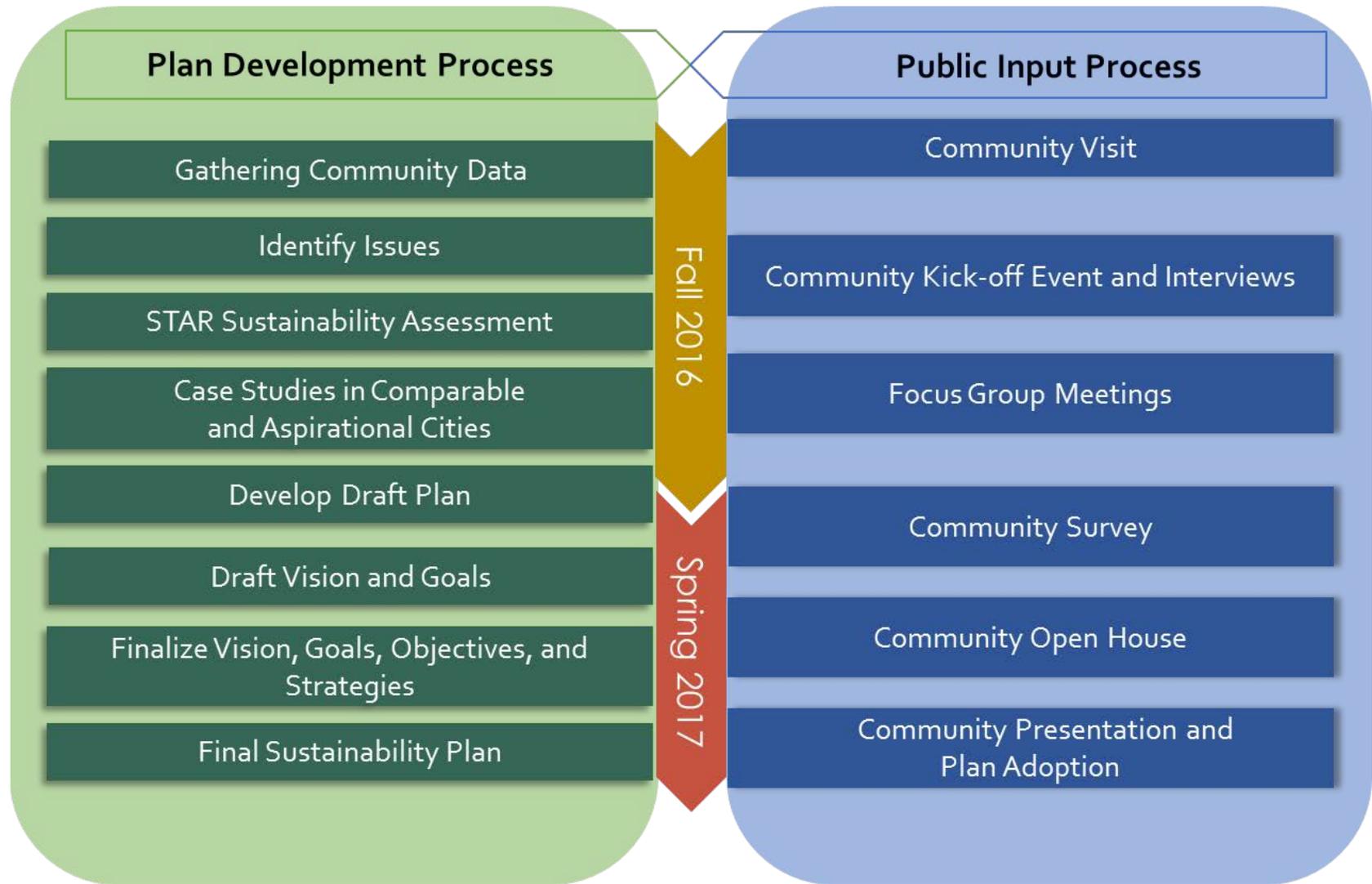
Figure 5: 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency. Source: Iowa Department of Education.

## Community College

North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) is located on the east side of Mason City and serves approximately 3000 students. NIACC is a 2 year college and has the distinction of being the oldest community college in Iowa. It offers a wide range of programs from agriculture to arts and health sciences to business.

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# 3 – METHODOLOGY



## Sustainability Indicators

The existing sustainability conditions of the city were assessed using the Sustainability Tools for Assessing & Rating Communities (STAR) system. This is a comprehensive certification system used to recognize and promote sustainable practices in communities across the country. Eight communities in Iowa currently utilize the STAR system, including the cities of Davenport, Dubuque, and Iowa City, which are certified as 4-STAR Communities, recognized for national excellence. Charles City and Des Moines are both 3-STAR Communities and West Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, and Johnson County are participating STAR Member Communities.

The STAR system was modified for use in our assessment of Mason City, focusing on outcomes and actions that are most applicable to Mason City. Twenty-six indicators, spread across the three pillars of sustainability, were selected to inform the plan and gauge Mason City's progress towards

sustainability. Findings from this abbreviated STAR assessment were paired with community input to guide the



Figure 7: STAR Communities. Source: STAR.

development of goals, objectives, and strategies. The complete STAR results and benchmarks can be found in the appendix.

# Public Engagement

Local residents had numerous opportunities to provide input and to shape the content of the plan, including its vision statement, goals, objectives, and strategies. The planning process collected public input from residents and stakeholders in meetings, interviews, and surveys. An open house presented the preliminary findings and recommendations on March 2, 2017.



Figure 8: September Community Outreach Activities. Source: Authors.

**Community input** started with interviewing 64 attendees at the Great River City Festival on September 17th and 18th to explore local concerns. Together with secondary data gathering, this provided a picture of community issues and assets.

**Focus group meetings** were held on November 17th and 18th at the St. James Lutheran Church and the Mason City Public Library. The focus groups introduced the project to stakeholders and gathered local expertise about many topics related to economic prosperity, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship. A total of eight focus groups, with 43 participants, were completed in seven different areas of expertise: Business & Service Clubs, Art & Culture, Faith Community, Landlords & Developers, Government & Law Enforcement, Social Services & Health, and Education. Focus group participants were identified by contacting local agencies and project partners, such as the city’s government and the county public health department, the art museum, NIACC, and Lutheran Social Services.



Figure 6: Focus Group Meetings. Source: Authors.

**A community-wide survey** was developed based on information gathered from the September interviews, STARS, focus groups, and case study research. The survey was distributed online in February and gathered community wide input from 578 respondents on goals and objectives, a vision statement, and sustainability strategies applicable to Mason City. Paper copies of the survey were also available at City Hall.

**A public open house** held on March 2, 2017 provided an opportunity for final community input into the plan. Key concepts, content areas, and potential strategies were presented to the community. During the open house, residents provided feedback and suggestions to select the best strategies for the plan. The final plan, revised in response to community input, was presented to the city council on April 25, 2017.



Figure 7: Planning Projects Open house. Source: Authors.

## Comparable & Aspirational Cities

Comparable and aspirational cities provide benchmarks for the community to assess current conditions, and tested ways to promote sustainable development. Comparable cities share similar demographic characteristics and are in the Midwest. Comparable cities Manitowoc, WI and Burlington, IA are similar to Mason City based on the following criteria:

- 10,000 - 50,000 population
- High retail sales per capita
- Healthcare & hospital presence

Aspirational cities have successful on-going sustainability strategies, practices, and plans in place for their communities. The three aspirational cities providing applicable and useful sustainability models and practices for the plan are Branson, MO, Greensburg, KS, and Dubuque, IA.

# 4 – COMPARABLE & ASPIRATIONAL CITIES

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		Comparable Cities			Aspirational Cities		
		Mason City	Manitowoc	Burlington	Greensburg	Branson	Dubuque
	Population	27,775	33,443	25,559	933	10,942	58,068
	Percentage over 65 age	17.9%	18.5%	18.1%	16.2%	19.3%	16.8%
	Median Household Income	\$42,009	\$41,280	\$37,223	\$37,667	\$38,425	\$48,806
	Retail Sales per Capita	\$27,073	\$16,648	\$11,968	N/A	\$55,734	\$23,314
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	20.9%	21.8%	20.9%	23.6%	22.9%	28.9%

Figure 8: Comparable and Aspirational Cities. Source: U.S. Census

## Comparable Cities

Comparable cities provide benchmarks for Mason City and ideas about relevant best practices. The comparable cities set realistic parameters to ensure that the implementation of this plan can improve sustainability over time in Mason City. The comparable cities provide a baseline, thus showing how much improvements in sustainability can be contributed to the implementation of this plan.

## Manitowoc, Wisconsin

Manitowoc is a community on the coast of Lake Michigan in Wisconsin. With a population of over 33,000, it is slightly larger than Mason City, but serves the same role as a regional hub for its surrounding area, with a strong healthcare industry and local retail shopping options. Manitowoc has many similar economic and social characteristics to Mason City, including income, demographics, educational attainment.

The city produced a Sustainability Policy Memo during their last Comprehensive Plan update in 2009, which outlines

potential future steps for sustainable initiatives to pursue. The City has a Sustainability Committee that advises elected officials on the implementation of sustainability policies. Manitowoc also has a Complete Streets Advisory Committee to promote safe bicycling and active transportation throughout the city.

## Burlington, Iowa

Burlington is a community of 25,663 citizens, located on the Mississippi River in Southeast Iowa. The county seat of Des Moines County, Burlington serves as a regional center for manufacturing, retail, education, healthcare and recreation. The Great River Health Systems is the largest employer in the region with 1927 employees.

Burlington has a strong outdoor culture and plentiful community amenities. The city is currently working on a Downtown Flood Mitigation Project to reduce damages from flooding and improve Burlington’s riverfront and downtown space. The comprehensive plan of Burlington developed a vision and goals on business growth, tourism, destination, diverse retail sectors, and community character in arts, culture and historic resources. The city is working with local schools, community partnerships, and local businesses to develop a job training program and support knowledge-based and creative industries.

## Aspirational Cities

The aspirational cities were chosen based on their focus on successful sustainable strategies, practices, and plans. Branson, MO, Greensburg, KS, and Dubuque, IA all have successful strategies that informed the planning process of this plan. The cities selected are smaller communities in the Midwest, establishing a reputation for sustainability. Successful strategies implemented in these communities can be used in Mason City to accomplish its goals, objectives, and strategies.

## Greensburg, Kansas

Greensburg is a small city in Southwestern Kansas that was struck by a tornado in 2007. Following the disaster, its 780 residents received federal assistance to create a new sustainable comprehensive redevelopment plan. Like Mason City, the city has an aging population and low unemployment rate. The city hopes to attract younger generations through the proposals in this comprehensive sustainability plan and be a blueprint for small rural communities throughout the U.S.

The plan has a strong focus on economic development and sees sustainability as a way to promote fiscal responsibility. The city provides resources and incentives for businesses and residents who build green buildings and the city markets itself as a rural green hub. The city hopes to realize the potential of the bountiful wind and solar energy resources, reducing its carbon footprint.

Through these programs and marketing, the city is slowly growing its population by attracting young professionals and families interested in sustainability and its new school. The school is LEED Platinum certified and promotes sustainability practices in the classroom. Between 2010 and 2015, the population between the ages of 20 and 40 increased by over twenty percent.

**Strategies implemented**

*Greensburg GreenTown* - Residents formed Greensburg GreenTown, a non-profit organization that provides resources and support to individuals and businesses interested in building green buildings. The organization collects donations, holds fundraisers, and receives grants through the state’s economic development office to provide small grants aimed at supporting local sustainability initiatives.



Figure 9: Greensburg GreenTown.

*Green Building* - The city adapted an ordinance for all new city-owned buildings over 4000 ft<sup>2</sup> to be LEED Platinum. The city now keeps track of the energy consumption of its public buildings and encourages on-site renewable energy generation (NREL Greensburg). The city refers to U.S. Department of Energy tax deductions for energy efficient commercial buildings based on the 2005 Energy Policy Act, and has a chart of federal grant and loan programs. The city has ten LEED certified buildings, four of which are private businesses.

*Green Economic Development* - The city embraced sustainability as means to be fiscally responsible, and its commitment to a green future differentiates the town for economic development marketing and attracting young families. New industries are attracted and build on local assets, including agricultural waste, byproducts, consumer products, and the railroad linking Greensburg to Kansas City and El Paso through the Union Pacific network. The city tries to generate jobs appropriate for the local population while being more resource-efficient. BTI Wind Energy builds commercial and individual wind turbines in the city. The SunChips Business Incubator offers an affordable space for innovators to collaborate

*Sustainable Comprehensive Plan* - A sustainable comprehensive plan encourages sustainability through recommending hiring a part time sustainable development coordinator, allowing accessory dwelling units, a green building incentive program, and a workforce development

plan. Making sustainability work in a small rural setting makes Greensburg unique and aspirational.

## Branson, Missouri

Although Branson Missouri is considerably smaller than Mason City with a population of nearly 11,000, Branson and Mason City share several common attributes. Branson is a Midwestern city that values and promotes a strong musical and cultural heritage. It developed a successful tourism industry with retail sales per capita of \$55,734, according to the U.S. Census, more than double that of Mason City. Branson’s population has grown since 2010 by 8.4 percent and the city has recently adopted new plans that incorporates sustainability practices.

The Branson Community Plan 2030, adopted by the city in 2012, identifies strategies and action steps related to sustainable development, growth, environment, and finances. The Spirit of 76 Plan, adopted in April 2014, looks specifically at Highway 76 and strategies for street beautification that includes sustaining the uniqueness of the community while improving aesthetics and visitor experience. The Historic Downtown Branson Streetscape Master Plan was adopted in March 2015.

### Strategies implemented

*Sustainability Council & City Commitment* - Branson created a Sustainability Council with dedicated members from each of the city departments meeting to discuss current sustainability

issues and implement city level projects. Municipal projects include paperless efforts, recycling, chemical reduction, community gardens, drug drop box, and an employee sustainable incentive program.

Sustainability education and awareness is incorporated into employer practices. A sustainability orientation video is used for new hires and employees have access to an individual award for developing and implementing sustainable projects within their departments.



Figure 10: Glass Recycling Program of the year Award. Source: Branson 2015 Sustainability Annual Report.

In 2015 the city collected 2.6 tons of household chemicals, preventing contamination of water through sewer, soil, and

stormwater. The fire department implemented “the arsenal” cleaning station that dispenses the proper amount of solution necessary to complete the task of a selected application, reducing cost and over use of chemical cleaners.

Recycling efforts are incorporated into city practice by adding 20 recycle bins in the community. About 90 percent of public furniture and street poles are made of recycled plastic. Recycling efforts have had steady growth, with 667 tons of recycled materials in 2016.

*Awareness and Recognition* – Branson was awarded the 2016 “Glass Recycling Program of the Year” by Ripple Glass of Kansas City, MO. An award that included 4 states and resulted in a prize of \$10,000. The city used it to provide fiberglass insulation to the Branson Convention Center, further building community commitment and awareness.

## Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque was selected as an aspirational city because it is well known across Iowa for its sustainability initiatives and efforts. Dubuque was recently involved as a partner community with the Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC), producing several sustainability-related projects, including the development of a set of sustainability indicators, a housing assessment, and a local food action plan. Although Dubuque has a population almost double that of Mason City, it has many similar common characteristics, including a rich cultural history and strong relationship with its river that

shaped the identity of the community.

With the support of the Mayor and Council, the City of Dubuque has made sustainability a top priority since 2006. Dubuque has strong public interest and support in becoming a more sustainable community, starting with the community-led Sustainable Dubuque task force. Through community-wide input, including community meetings and a survey, a vision and model for sustainability were created, based around twelve Key Sustainability Principles which have been adopted by the city (Sustainable Dubuque). Sustainable Dubuque is now the community’s brand and primary model for engaging citizens, non-profits, businesses, and government representatives in local issues that can be solved sustainably. The city provides yearly community grants of up to \$2,500 to local businesses and residents for sustainability projects. Several community garden initiatives for community education and engagement have been funded through sustainability grants.

### **Strategies implemented**

*Historic Redevelopment* - The Historic Millwork District in Dubuque is being redeveloped as a mixed use neighborhood, including space for housing, arts and culture, entrepreneurial businesses, and open space. Over 1 million square feet of space in the buildings are being renovated using sustainable best practices. Eagle Point Solar, the largest solar developer in Iowa, has its headquarters located in this district.

*Awards and Recognition* – With the help of over 30 area partners, the City Dubuque became certified as a 4-STAR Community in 2015. The City also received a 2010 Innovation Award in Sustainable Development from the National Association of Development Organizations.



Figure 11: Dubuque Historic Millwork District, Redeveloped for Mixed Use. Source: Sustainable Dubuque.

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# 5 – RESULTS & FOCUS AREAS



## STAR Sustainability Assessment

The community assessment through STAR, community outreach activities, and census data shows that Mason City is performing well in some sustainability areas, but can make improvements in others.

The assessment of Mason City is based on an abridged version of the STAR Community Rating System. For the purpose of our assessment, the evaluation was narrowed to 25 Community Outcomes (Indicators) that are most relevant to Mason City. These sustainability indicators were evaluated through the use of publicly available data sources (primarily the American Community Survey/Census), research/ranking by third-party organizations, GIS mapping, and community survey questions.

The following table is a summary of selected indicators that are applicable to Mason City, and the whole analysis can be found in the appendix. While the city is performing great in areas such as active transportation, accessibility, and historic preservation, the community could see some improvement in business and job creation, educational attainment, poverty, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy rates.

# SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

## Exceeding Expectations

-  5.3% **walk or bike to work**
-  **EPA air quality** report shows **0 days** of unhealthy air
-  **Biological integrity** (water) supports aquatic life and fish consumption
-  **Unemployment rate** decreased 2.9% (2010-16)
-  Over 75% **live within 1 mile** of a **community venue**
-  **5 designated historic districts**



## Doing Well - Almost There

-  **Pollutants** (e. coli) in drinking water **declined** (2012-15)
-  **Safe stormwater** management permits – (NPDES) compliant
-  Median household **income increased \$1,300** (2010-14)
-  **Exporting industries:** Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation
-  Violent **crime rates declined** (2013-15)
-  Emergency **preparedness** – (NIMS) compliant
-  **Voter turnout** increased to **36%** (2010-13)
-  AARP **Livability Index** ranks **low** in job access, transportation, & environment

## Need Improvement

-  Housing and employment opportunities **downtown**
-  **Transportation costs** (27%) are **8%** higher than national average
-  Drove alone **commuting** is **5%** higher than national average
-  **Bacteria** in water prevents swimming
-  **Lost 47 business** establishments (2009-14)  
**Lost 700 jobs** (2010-16)
-  **Post-secondary educational attainment** decreased (2009-14)
-  Share of creative industries **declined** (2010-15)
-  The **poverty rate** (15.5%), is **3% higher** than the **statewide average**
-  **Poverty** among vulnerable populations **increased** (2000-14)
-  **3rd grade reading** proficiency (65%), is **11.7% below** the **statewide average** (2015-16 school year)
-  Overall **Graduation Rate** (87.6%), is **3.2% below** the **statewide average**

Figure 12: Sustainability Assessment Overview. Source: Authors.

# Public Outreach

## September Interviews

At the Friday Night Live and River City Festival events on September 17th and 18th, 64 attendees were interviewed at the Great River City Festival to explore community strengths and local concerns. They identified the best and the most frustrating things about Mason City. The interviews revealed that Architecture and the sense of community are the two best things about living in Mason City, while drugs and the downtown mall were identified as frustrating aspects of living in the city.

Additionally, a tense political climate following a previous economic development decision was identified as a challenge.

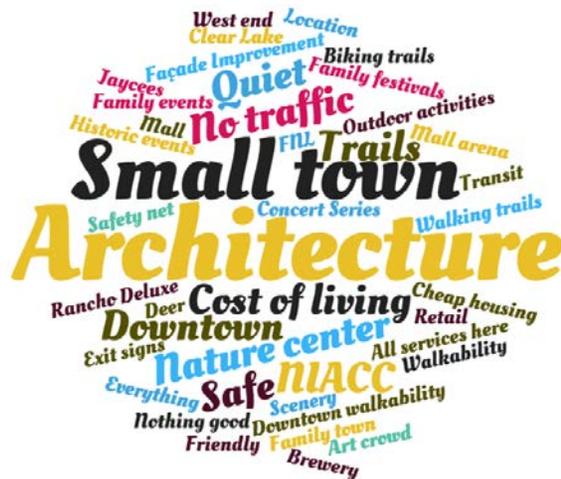


Figure 13: Best Things about Mason City, September Interviews. Source: Authors.

## Focus Groups

At the November 17th focus group meeting, general core questions were asked to identify a common vision for the community. Unique questions were then asked based on the participants' area of expertise. The number of questions and content covered varied by group and were modified as needed. The focus group guides can be found in the appendix. Questions about the strengths and weaknesses of Mason City included: What do you like or dislike about Mason City? What parts of Mason City do you show off? What parts of Mason City do you avoid? Common themes for community needs, top strengths and weaknesses are shown in the table below.

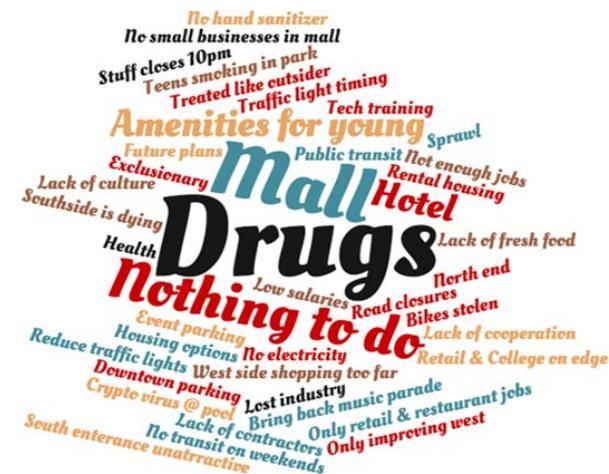


Figure 14: Frustrating Things about Mason City, September Interviews. Source: Authors.

In relation to the recent economic development issue regarding the building of a pork plant and the resulting community division, participants discussed the local resistance to change and a challenging political climate. Participants also expressed concerns about lingering negative perceptions of minority populations and the challenge to improve what one participant coined as “hidden diversity.”

Focus Group Common Themes			
Collaboration and Marketing	Economic Development	Housing	Community
Better advertisement of community assets	Jobs that match the workforce and can sustain families	Need for short term and high quality rental options	Downtown – Positive changes in revitalization, but negative effects of crime in certain areas
Collaboration among stakeholders to make better use of resources	Waiting lists for childcare services in the city	Current stock of housing does not match need	North Federal Avenue is dilapidated
	Desire for locally owned business		Desire to attract and keep younger population, family friendly community

Figure 15: Focus Group Common Themes. Source: Authors.

Focus Group Identified Strengths & Weaknesses	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Small town community-safe and sense of family	North end of the community
Arts, culture, and entertainment	Resistance to change and political climate
Parks and trails (outdoor amenities)	Public transportation
Schools	Low wages & underemployment
Downtown	Shopping mall

Figure 16: Focus Group Identified Strengths and Weaknesses. Source: Authors.

## Community Survey

A community wide survey was distributed in February through the local Blue Zone email listserv of over 7000 people, receiving 578 respondents.

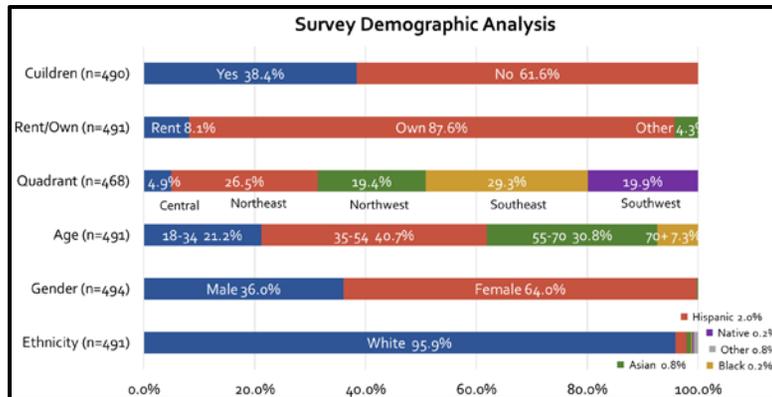


Figure 17: Survey Respondents Demographics. Source: Authors.

**Vision** – Three alternative vision statements, each representing a pillar of sustainability, were provided. 38 percent of respondents selected the sustainability vision that emphasizes economic development:

*Mason City will be a statewide leader in sustainability practices with thriving local businesses and employment opportunities for all. The community will work together towards a peaceful, culturally vibrant, resilient and family friendly place.*

In addition to the 3 alternatives, respondents were given the opportunity to create their own vision statement.

Open ended responses included:

*"Safe community that people want to live in, visit, and raise a family"*

*"An educational and cultural destination that focuses on revitalizing the downtown area, bringing younger people into the community, and furthering green initiatives"*

*"A community with higher paying jobs that will sustain families"*

When asked about in what area Mason City could be a statewide leader, iconic architecture, musical heritage, and the historic downtown were selected the most.

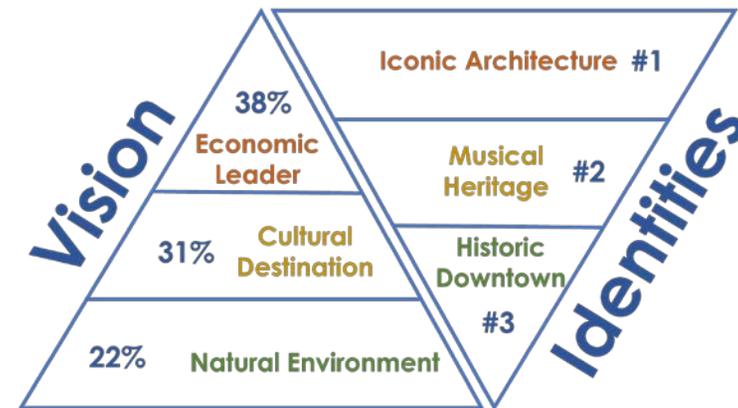


Figure 18: Survey Vision and Identities. Source: Authors.

**Diversity** – Given the increased diversity enrollment in the school district, one question focused on strategies toward inclusiveness.

*Survey question: What should Mason City do to become more inclusive of younger diverse populations?*

40 percent of respondents support having more cultural events.

32 percent support increased community resources for English Language Learners (ELL).

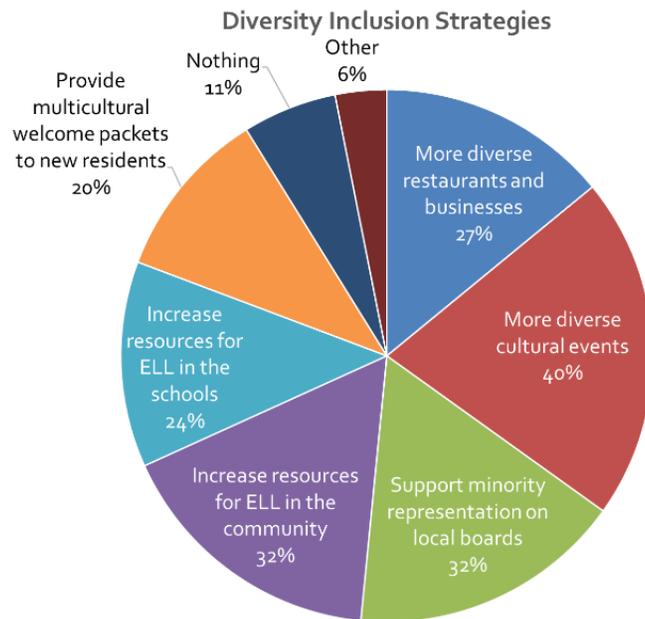


Figure 19: Support for Diversity Inclusion Strategies. Source: Authors.

**Economic development** – Mason City’s unemployment has decreased 3 percent since the great recession, but the city has lost over 700 jobs since 2010.

*Survey question: How willing are you to support financial incentives for new and or existing businesses if they commit to creating new jobs that pay livable wages.*

A total of 92 percent support tax incentives for businesses that commit to creating jobs that pay livable wages.

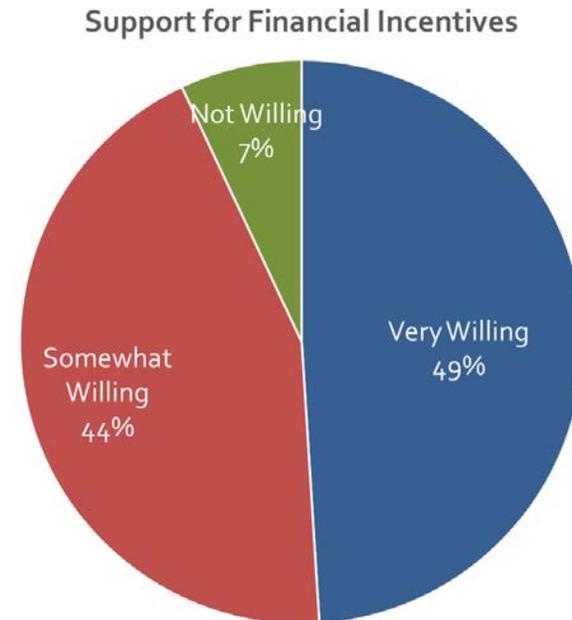


Figure 20: Willingness to support tax incentives for businesses increasing the number of livable wage jobs. Source: Authors.

**Arts and cultural** - Art and culture is one of the main strengths in the community.

*Survey question: Would you like to see more art and cultural facilities in Mason City?*

49 percent support more investment in public arts and culture.

*Survey question: what strategies would best support Mason City's arts and cultural assets?*

51 percent support new city support new events and festivals.

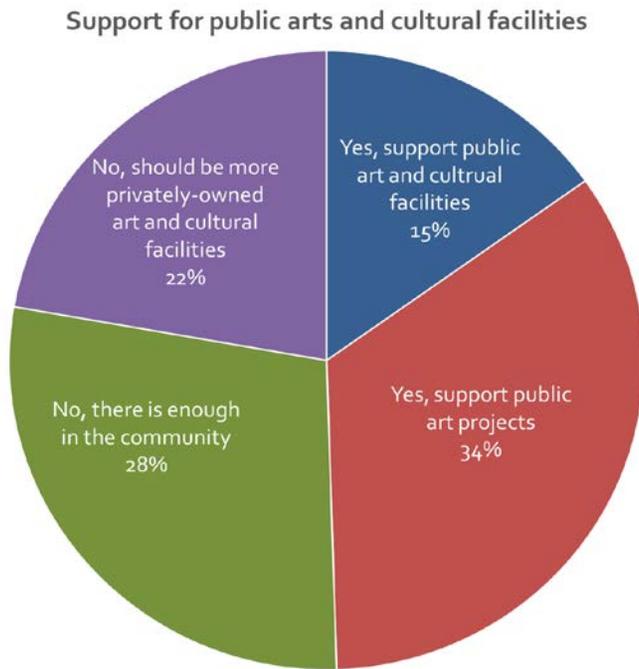


Figure 21: Support for public arts and cultural facilities. Source: Authors.

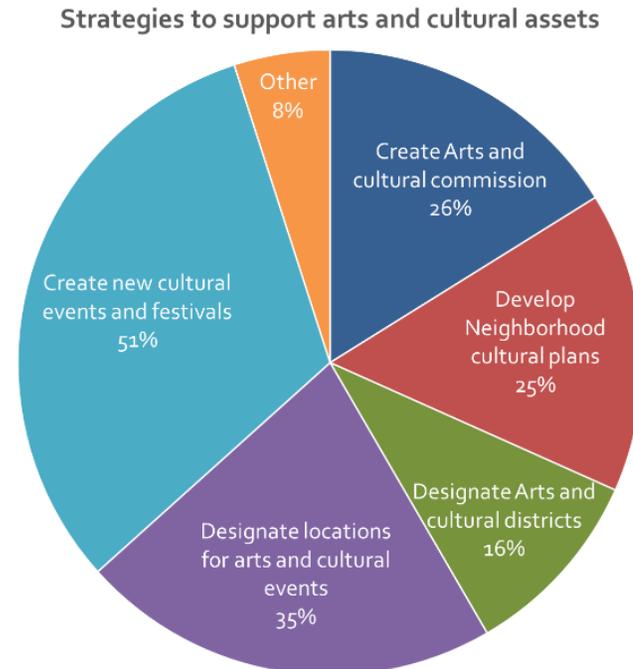


Figure 22: Strategies to Support Arts and Cultural Assets. Source: Authors.

**Rental housing units** – In the focus groups, local experts indicated the need for short-term and high quality rental options.

*Survey question: Which of the following rental types would you like to see more of in Mason City?*

48 percent expressed a preference for mixed use buildings for new rental units. Of the respondents who are renters, 43 percent prefer townhouses over other rental options.

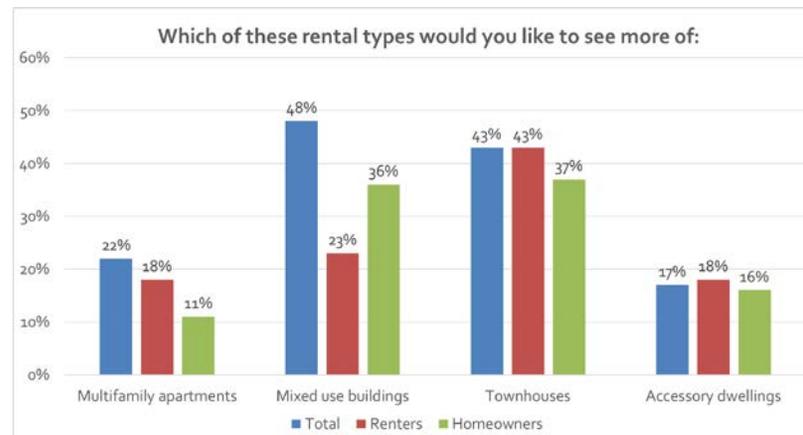


Figure 23: Rental Types Preferred to See More Of. Among All, Renters, and Homeowners. Source: Authors.

**Environment** – Issues or concerns with regards to the environment were not identified in the interviews and focus groups. An open ended question was included in the survey to gauge public interest in environmental issues.

*Survey question: What, if any, initiatives would you like to see to improve the environmental quality in the city?*

39 percent of responses included support for improvements of parks and trails.

**Sustainability coalition.**

In response to focus groups comments that Mason City organizations and leaders have limited interactions, in response to their stated desire to increase collaboration and work together, and in light of the successful Sustainable Dubuque Task Force, we presented residents with the option of creating a Mason City Sustainability Coalition.

Three quarters of respondents (72%) are not only interested, but also potentially willing (yes or maybe answers) to participate in the Sustainability Coalition.

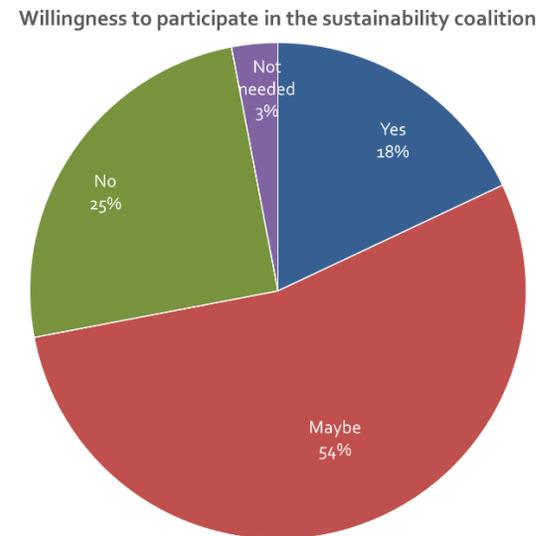


Figure 24: Willingness to Participate in the Sustainability Coalition. Source: Authors.

## Open House

On March 2, 2017, a public open house provided an opportunity for Mason City residents to learn about sustainability and the key concepts of the plan, and to provide input about the draft goals, local priorities and preferences with regards to specific strategies. Over 70 residents attended the open house. The assessment and indicator data we gathered, along with previous community input, was displayed for participants to review and discuss with the planning team. A 'pledge wall' was displayed in the center of the room, offering participants the opportunity to share how they will help Mason City become a better place.

These pledges included:

"I pledge to try to improve the perception of the city for kids"

"I pledge to make more art"

"I pledge to promote reading"

"I pledge to engage in grassroots organizing"

*-Open house attendees*

Participants support efforts for a livable wage and suggested that new jobs could include wider benefits packages, such as health care, sick leave, and vacation time. Discussion regarding the development of a coalition and implementation of sustainability efforts would be best suited as an incremental process, i.e., starting with small steps and projects that everyone can support.

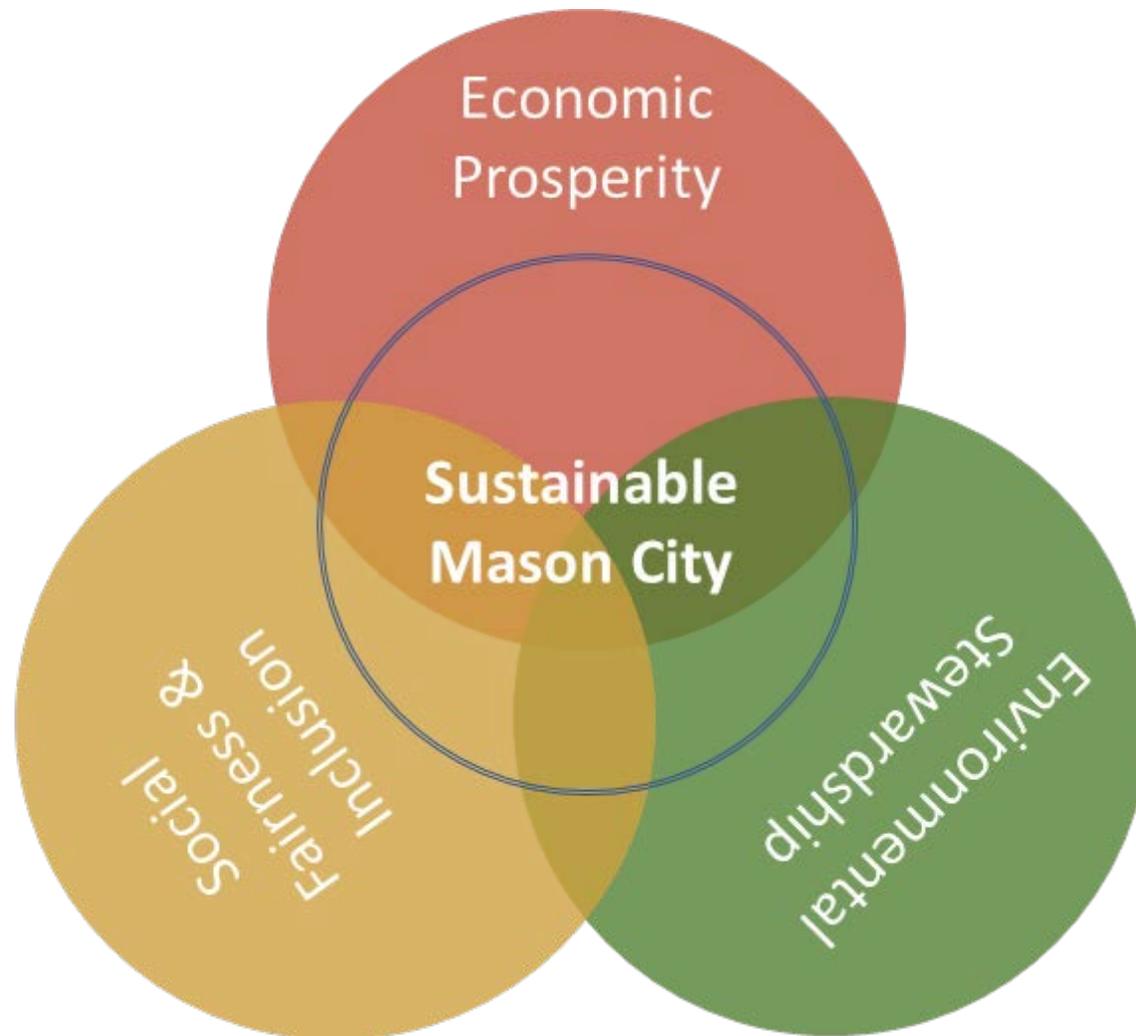
## Focus Areas

Based on results from public input and sustainability indicators from the STAR system, four focus areas with goals for a sustainable future are identified:

- **Community engagement:** The community sustainability coalition will drive sustainability efforts through education and action with citizens and public leadership working together
- **A prospering local economy:** The community will have a thriving local economy with livable wages for all
- **Social fairness and inclusion:** The community will collaborate to expand arts and culture, celebrate diversity, and increase educational success
- **Environmental Stewardship:** The community will promote environmental awareness and promote protection of ecosystems and natural areas

# 6 - OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES & IMPLEMENTATION

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# Community Engagement

Small communities throughout the Midwest are getting creative and smart about the ways in which they can improve and grow for generations to come. A sustainable community considers the well-being of all citizens and incorporates strategies that are good for today and the future. A sense of

community and family was identified by focus group participants as a strength, but a lack of collaboration to market the assets and resources of Mason City are a challenge.



**Community Coalition** – grass roots efforts working on sustainable projects

**Policy** – city policies & practices that promote sustainability

**Sustainability Council** – city led group dedicated to sustainability

**GOAL:** The community sustainability coalition will drive sustainability efforts through education and action with citizens and public leadership working together



OBJECTIVES	RATIONALE	EXAMPLE STRATEGIES	DESIRED OUTCOMES
<p>Create a community sustainability coalition</p>	<p>Focus groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for collaboration and unified work toward community goals</li> <li>• Identified <b>lack of communication</b> among stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p>Coalition membership and structure is determined and regular meetings occur.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City creates a sustainability office</li> <li>• Coalition becomes a 501c3</li> </ul> <p>Public private partnership - Sustainability council is codified</p>	<p>Sustainability efforts are achieved through community driven actions</p>



## Sustainability Coalition

A community driven coalition will have a majority of citizen membership and include at least one city council member plus key partners. Partners include education, health, art & culture, social services, faith, minorities, environmental groups, business, and others as identified by coalition members.

City staff provides in kind support to the coalition, providing meeting space, helping with general operations, and taking an advisory role as needed.

# 91

people who responded to our survey said...

**Yes**, I would participate in a Mason City Sustainability Coalition.

*“I pledge to engage in grassroots organizing.”*

*“I pledge to help.”*

-Mason City residents who attended the open house

### Case Study: City of Branson, Mo.

*Sustainability Council* – The Branson Sustainability Council was developed by city administration and given staff support. Every department leader must sit on the council or send a representative to regular meetings.

The city provided seed money for the council, \$10,000, which was used for small grants (up to \$2,000) available to departments to implement sustainable projects within their offices.

Projects include paperless efforts, recycling, chemical reduction, community gardens, drug drop box, and an employee sustainable incentive program. The employee program offers small cash rewards for individuals making a difference with a sustainability effort.

Source: Personal interview 1-25-2017  
Branson, MO., Environmental Specialist

# Prospering Local Economy

A sustainable economy includes diversified employment opportunities and efficient use of local resources through cooperation, reducing the vulnerability to business closures and supply chain disruptions. Manufacturing, health care, and transportation are strong exporting industries, bringing money into the community. However, the community faces threats in its shrinking workforce and number of employed people due to a loss in jobs, local business establishments, and the stagnant

number of people with post-secondary degrees. The city serves as a regional employment center: over 9000 people commute into Mason City every day, not fully contributing to the tax base while using the city’s services. Based on best practices from aspirational cities and elsewhere, as well as community input, the following strategies will help the community focus its economic development efforts in the future.



**GOAL:** *The community will have a thriving local economy with livable wages for all*

OBJECTIVES	RATIONALE	EXAMPLE STRATEGIES	DESIRED OUTCOMES
<p><b>Grow small, locally owned businesses in nodes identified by the Comprehensive Plan</b></p> 	<p>Lost 47 business establishments (2009-14)</p> <p>Focus groups indicated desire for <b>locally owned</b> businesses</p>	<p>Study the use of local hiring and purchasing agreements</p> <p>Study potential <b>local supply</b> sources for businesses</p> <p>Prioritize locally owned businesses in decision making processes</p>	<p>Increase in the number of business establishments in nodes</p>
<p><b>Use tax incentives to support businesses that increase the number of livable wage jobs</b></p>	<p><b>92% support tax incentives</b> for businesses that expand the number of <b>livable wage jobs</b></p> <p>Median household income</p>	<p>Study to determine local livable wage</p> <p>Develop and implement guidelines for tax incentives</p>	<p>An increase in livable wage jobs</p> <p>Median household incomes increase and poverty rates decline</p>

	<p>increased slower than rate of inflation</p> <p>The poverty rate is 3% higher than the statewide average</p>	<p>supporting <b>livable wage jobs</b></p> <p>Use livable wage recommendations for employees and contractors</p>	
<p><b>Support businesses that align with the current economic base and community identity, yet diversify and expand products and services</b></p> 	<p>Lost over 700 jobs (2010-16)</p> <p>Exporting industries: Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation are doing well</p> <p>September interviews revealed community tensions resulting from recent economic development decisions</p>	<p>Develop an economic and workforce development plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify labor shortages</li> <li>• <b>Establish target industries</b> and desired business attributes</li> </ul>	<p>An increase in sales of local products and services beyond Cerro Gordo County</p>
<p><b>Attract and keep young professionals</b></p> 	<p>Between 2009 and 2014, the population with a bachelor's degree declined</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for <b>short term, high quality rental options</b></li> <li>• Childcare waiting lists</li> </ul>	<p>A <b>housing study</b> identifies rental needs for young professionals</p> <p>Ensure <b>adequate childcare</b> is available</p>	<p>Increase and maintain a higher population of ages 21 to 40</p>

## Local Businesses

In the public outreach activities, community members indicated a desire for more locally owned businesses. These can serve neighborhood clusters and support a sense of community in the neighborhoods.

The updated comprehensive plan identifies neighborhood nodes of mixed use. The city serves as a regional retail hub and must provide “opportunities for jobs and growth” – Survey Respondent

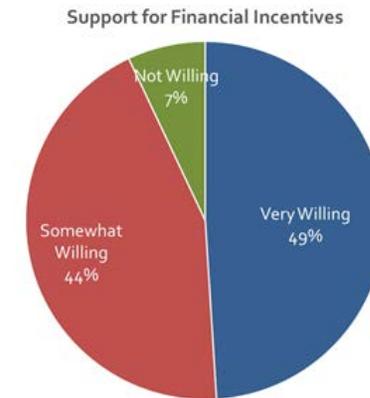


## Livable Wages

The community survey provided clear support for tax incentives supporting businesses creating new jobs that provide livable wages. At the open house, community members indicated that beyond a livable wage, new jobs could include wider benefits packages, such as health care, sick leave, and vacation time.

*“There are very few opportunities for college graduates to get suitable employment” – Survey Respondent*

**92%** of survey respondents support tax incentives for businesses if they commit to creating livable wage jobs



### Case Study: Greensburg, Kansas

*Green Economic Development* - The city embraced sustainability as means to be fiscally responsible, and its commitment to a green future differentiates the town for economic development marketing and attracting young families. New industries are attracted and build on local assets, including agricultural waste, byproducts, consumer products, and the railroad. The city tries to generate jobs appropriate for the local population while being more efficient. See chapter 4 for more details.

In Mason City, giving local businesses an opportunity to tour each other’s facilities and its waste products may lead to more locally captured resources for other businesses. This creates a local supply chain for products and keeps money local.

### Case Study: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

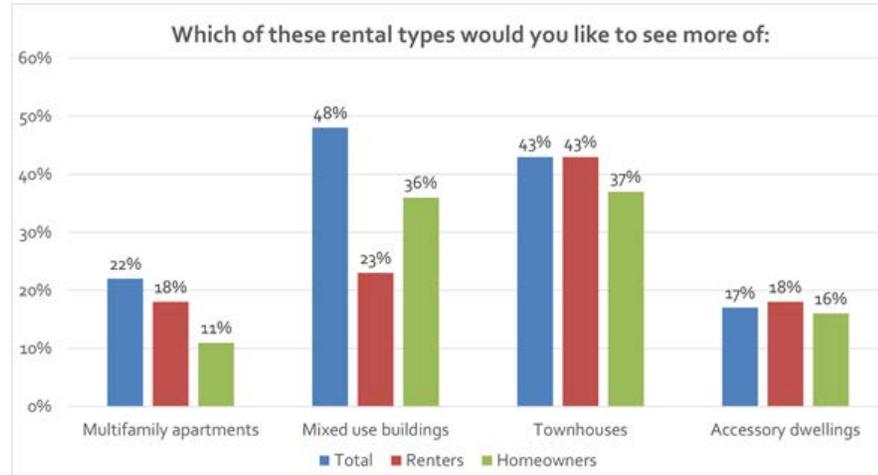
In order to stay competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy, Mason City must retain a highly educated workforce, while programs at the community college should connect with the local workforce needs.

The WRTP program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin enhances the ability of private sector organizations to recruit and develop a more diverse, qualified workforce in construction, manufacturing and emerging sectors of the regional economy. The program offers an opportunity to former welfare recipients and other low-income central city residents to acquire the skills they needed to qualify for family-sustaining jobs. The program promotes the goal of helping community residents achieve self-sufficiency.

In addition, Mason City has a large number of people commuting into the city every day for work. Providing quality housing will increase their options to move closer to work.

### Opportunities for Young Professionals

During the focus group discussions, the problem of quality rental options for temporary or new members of the community came up multiple times. When new residents to the community are not able to choose from a wide variety of quality rental options, they may not choose to make Mason City their permanent home. In addition, survey respondents indicated that they prefer rental options in mixed use buildings and townhouses.



### Industries that work for Mason City



In persuading businesses to locate in Mason City, the company culture and production should fit with the community character of Mason City. All current local businesses should be encouraged to expand as well. However, a more diverse array of products and services provide to a resilient economic base able to withstand national changes in the economy.

# Social Fairness and Inclusion

The community’s current image emphasizes arts, music, and architecture. The public inputs from the community, together with the STAR Community Indicators, show the local needs for a more socially inclusive and culturally vibrant community. Mason City has plenty of cultural assets and resources. Arts and culture, and strong sense of community have been

identified as the top two strengths in the city. However, the lack of collaboration among community organizations is a major challenge to best utilize existing community resources. Based on the public inputs and indicators, arts and culture, diversity and education were identified as priorities in the community to promote social inclusion in the community.

<b>GOAL: The community will expand arts and culture, celebrate diversity, and increase educational success</b> 			
OBJECTIVES	RATIONALE	EXAMPLE STRATEGIES	DESIRED OUTCOMES
<p><b>Create an arts and cultural workgroup among local artists, businesses, and organizations</b></p> 	<p>September interviews revealed <b>architecture</b> as one of the ‘best things’</p> <p>Focus groups identified need for <b>collaboration</b> and unified work toward community goals</p> <p>Community survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>49% support</b> more investment in culture and arts</li> <li>• <b>51% support</b> new city sponsored events and festivals</li> </ul>	<p>Establish a workgroup of the sustainability coalition to focus on arts and culture</p> <p>Develop and adopt an <b>arts and cultural plan</b></p>	<p>Culture and arts workgroup implements projects with a unified vision</p>

<p><b>Increase educational opportunities and student success</b></p> 	<p>3rd grade literacy is <b>11.7% below the state rate</b> of 76.8%</p> <p>32% support increased community resources for English Language Learners</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of childcare - waiting lists</li> <li>• Desire to attract young professionals and families</li> </ul>	<p>Complete a feasibility study to examine gaps between childcare available and local employer needs</p> <p>A school – parent partnership develops and implements <b>new reading projects</b> specific to English Language Learners</p> <p>Implement policy changes that reduce barriers for childcare entrepreneurs</p> <p><b>Music therapy</b> in community settings</p>	<p>Increased literacy rates</p> <p>Increased number of quality childcare sites and/or slots</p>
<p><b>Increase diverse representation in community leadership</b></p> 	<p>September interviews revealed <b>community tensions</b> resulting from recent economic development decisions</p> <p>Focus groups identified <b>resistance to change</b> and negative perceptions of minority population</p> <p><b>9.3%</b> - Mason City minority population</p> <p><b>18.9%</b> - District minority enrollment</p>	<p>Identify level of minority representation on local boards and organizations</p> <p>Local boards and organizations strive for membership that is <b>representative</b> of the community demographics</p>	<p>Community has a sense of inclusiveness and is welcoming to all</p>

## Arts and culture

In the public outreach activities, the community indicated the need for **collaboration** to preserve and expand existing art and cultural assets. In the community survey, the majority of respondents indicated their desire for more cultural festivals and events, and support for public art.

*"Festivals or highly advertised exhibits that highlight the heritage and culture of the minorities in order to increase knowledge and to debunk stereotypes"*

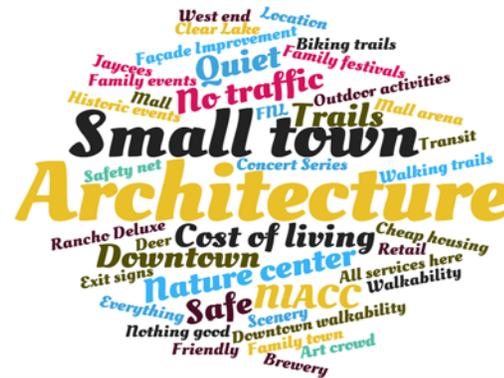
*"Better cooperation and promotion of existing events"*

**-Survey respondents**

*"Look into creative place-making or combining art with new community structures, in schools, providing services, etc."*

*"Expand what we already offer. We have good facilities."*

**-Survey respondents**



### Case Study:

#### City of Dubuque, IA

The Arts and Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission has seven members appointed by the city council to support and promote public awareness, accessibility and public participation in arts and cultural development in the city. The commission makes recommendations to the city regarding arts and cultural policies, funding, activities and implementation of programs in the city.

### Other examples:

#### Neighborhood block parties:

Mason City offers guidelines and resources for community members to organize neighborhood block parties. Residents are encouraged to integrate multicultural ethnic themes for block parties.

#### Little free library:

Local schools in Mason City dedicated to open little free libraries in surrounding neighborhoods and share educational resources for children and families. All members are encouraged to contribute to the effort.

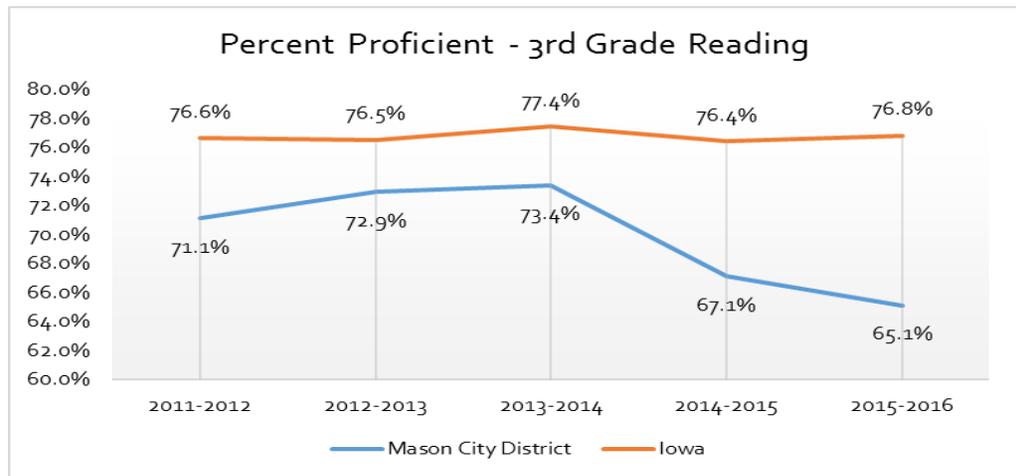


## Education

The community saw a declining 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy rate over the past five years. A strong education system is essential for the community to attract and retain young professionals and families. The lack of childcare was also a concern indicated by the focus groups.

*"Provide more sporting and training opportunities for youth and continue improving schools"*

*-Survey participants*



3<sup>rd</sup> grade **reading proficiency** is **11.7% below the statewide average**



## Diversity

The **younger generation is more diverse** (18% minority) than the total population (6% minority)

**Minority** (African American and Hispanic) **Graduation Rate** (86.7%) is **5% above** the statewide average



*"Encourage businesses to hire more diverse workers"*

*"Allow businesses to start in the area that would employ diverse cultures."*

*-Survey participants*

### Case Study:

#### Washington, IA.

In 2006 the city of Washington, Iowa made adjustments to the home occupation city ordinance in order to help **home based childcare providers** meet both the city and state requirements. Prior to the changes, the city's ordinance limited the number of staff in the home, but a childcare provider must have additional staff for ratios specific to quality practice and to meet state law. The city code adjustments made by Washington **allowed for people with childcare home occupations** to have additional staff as needed, thereby increasing the number of slots available.

# Environmental Stewardship

Connecting Mason City residents with their outdoor environment can have many benefits for both people and nature. The built and natural environment meet in many places throughout Mason City and impact each other in ways we do not always see. Air & water quality will be ongoing issues of importance for Mason City, as they both affect all residents and require diligent monitoring. Recent flooding

events have highlighted the importance of working cohesively with the natural environment to avoid costly damages and degradation of natural resources. Building on the community's assets such as extensive parks and trails, the strategies in this section focus on environmental issues important to Mason City residents.

<b>GOAL: The community will promote environmental awareness and protect ecosystems and natural areas</b> 			
OBJECTIVES	RATIONALE	EXAMPLE STRATEGIES	DESIRED OUTCOMES
<b>Expand understanding and awareness of natural systems</b>	Environment not considered a major issue during community outreach events	<b>Awareness and education</b> campaign in schools and community	Increased ecological literacy about environmental issues
<b>Protection of Natural Resources:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water quality</li> <li>• Flooding</li> </ul> 	Water quality issues beyond municipal boundaries  <b>Bacteria outbreaks</b> (such as E.coli.) prevent the use of public waters for recreation.  Recent flooding events caused disruptions including road closures and <b>property buyouts</b> (2008)	Lead formation of a <b>Watershed Management Authority for the Winnebago River</b>  Target sensitive areas along waterways for native vegetation and stormwater best management practices  Encourage private landowners to implement stormwater management practices on their property	Local waterways consistently meet all Clean Water Act standards  Recreational use of water bodies is expanded  Less severe & fewer flooding events

<p><b>Promote biodiversity through expansion of wildlife habitat in green spaces and parks</b></p> 	<p>Limited biodiversity and native plants in public parks</p> <p>Survey found support for <b>parks improvements</b></p>	<p>Identify areas for native plantings and implement in parks and community plans</p>	<p>Resilient, diverse green spaces</p> <p>Biodiversity will increase</p>
<p><b>Become a bicycle Friendly Community</b></p> 	<p>5.3% of residents walk or bike to work</p> <p>25% of survey respondents support improvements for trails</p>	<p>Apply for Bicycle Friendly Community Certification from the League of American Bicyclists</p>	<p>Attain Bronze Bicycle Friendly Community Certification</p> <p>Regional and national recognition as a leader in active transportation</p>

## Environmental Awareness



Environmental issues were not on the forefront of the community's mind during public outreach events and input. Increasing educational programs throughout the community will ensure awareness and understanding of natural systems and how they benefit the community.

*"More youth educational programs about nature"*

*-Survey Respondent*

**10%** of survey respondents support expanding community cleanup days throughout the city.

Open house attendees also showed support for community clean up days.

## Protection of Natural Resources



Coordinating with regional partners to form a Watershed Management Authority will help address issues with both water quality and flooding events.

### Case Study:

#### Upper Cedar Watershed Management Improvement Authority

Formed in 2012 as a 28E agreement under Iowa law, this multi-jurisdictional organization oversees efforts to improve water quality, reduce the risk of flooding, and educate local residents about watersheds. The Upper Cedar subwatershed covers 1,685 square miles across six counties in Northeast Iowa. Participating organizations in a Watershed Management Authority (WMA) include Soil and Water Conservation Districts, cities, and counties that are within the boundaries of the watershed. In 2015 the Upper Cedar WMA created a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan to identify and prioritize the needs within the watershed. WMAs can also distribute funding allocated to them for water quality and flood mitigation projects.

## Green Space & Parks Biodiversity



Converting some of the mowed grass areas in parks to native turf or wildflowers can reduce maintenance costs and provide habitat for wildlife within the city such as birds and butterflies. Planting a mix of native grasses and flowers will bloom and flower throughout the season, creating an attractive landscape that can more effectively absorb excess stormwater. Native plants that are adapted to the local climate are also more resilient to drought and will better survive Iowa's hot summer days without requiring irrigation.

## Sustainability Assessment:

Transportation costs (27%) are **8%** higher than national average

"Enhance trails and sidewalks."

-Survey Respondent

"More natural prairie areas in parks where there are large green spaces, instead of mowing."

-Survey Respondent

**13%** of respondents would like to see more work done in parks

## Bicycle Friendly Community



Strengthening the active culture in the community to capitalize on the existing assets of trails and bicycle infrastructure can grow the portion of commuters using active transportation. Compact development and a variety of uses can make cycling a convenient and advantageous way to get around town. The benefits of becoming a Bicycle Friendly Community include lower transportation costs and emissions, and increased safety for commuters.

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# 7 – CONCLUSION

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## A Sustainable Future

Mason City faces both opportunities and challenges that are not uncommon to many Midwestern communities. With a population of 27,366, it is large enough to function as a regional healthcare and retail hub for surrounding rural areas, but it's small enough to maintain a quaint community feel. Its unique musical heritage and local iconic architecture provide a rare lens by which to envision and achieve a sustainable future. The Mason City Sustainability Plan is the blueprint to begin that process.

This plan provides a foundation for the community to build upon. It is not a local government driven plan with finite steps and actions that one office can mark off as complete. It is a framework for local residents to come together and design a sustainable future that embodies the knowledge and expertise of the people who live and work in Mason City. It is a living document that grows beyond the strategies and adapts to local nuances that community members understand best.

The implementation of the Mason City Sustainability Plan relies on the passion and energy of residents combined with city leadership commitment and collaboration. As the first ever strategic sustainability plan for the community, it functions as a jump start into new ideas, new challenges, and new opportunities.

# APPENDIX

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# Public Outreach

## River City Festival Interviews Questionnaire

1. Where do you live?

Mason City (Downtown/Central    Northeast    Northwest    Southeast    Southwest)

Clear Lake

Cerro Gordo County

*Other ->*

*If outside of county/state:*    How often do you visit Mason City?

2. Where do you work? Mason City / Other

3. What brings you here?

4. What are the best things about living (visiting) in Mason City now?

Schools   Parks   Health   Raise family   Culture/Arts   Shopping   Jobs   Community   Aging/Retirement   Politics

5. What are the most frustrating things about living (visiting) in Mason City?

Traffic   Parking   Small town   Jobs   Shopping   Education/schools   Poverty   Identity   Pork Plant   Politics   Crime

6. What are your hopes for Mason City in the future?

Economy/jobs:

Environment:

Culture:

Social Equity:

Transportation/Mobility:

7. How many years have you lived in Mason City?

8. Do you rent or own your home?

9. Gender:    M/F

10. Kids <18?    Y/N

11. Age:    18-34    35-54    55-70    71+

12. Employed/Retired/Student

## Focus Groups Questionnaire

### Opening/ Introductory Questions

1. Introductions –
2. How long have you been in the City and what do you like the most about it?
3. What parts of MC do you show off/ what do you avoid when people come to visit?

### Transition & Core Questions

4. If you were to recommend that someone should move to MC what would you say to convince them?
5. How has Mason City changed in past 10 years?
6. Where do you see the city growing in next 10 years?(directional) –
7. What would you like to see in the future (people, amenities, businesses, bars?)

### Equity & Health

8. IN what ways does MC support diversity and encourage new families to move to the area?
9. What are the biggest challenges for families in accessing the resources they need?
10. Aging in place has been highlighted as a priority in MC. What would you change or improve to support seniors in MC?
11. How can health outcomes be improved for all citizens in the next 5-10 years?

### Economic Development

1. What are the obstacles that prevent job growth or higher wages in MC? (kind of similar to second question)
2. Viewing the current context of the city, which businesses do you think are viable for the Mason City to pursue? What businesses should MC not pursue?
3. Where within the city do you want to see more business growth?

### Education

1. What types of changes (positive and/or negative) has the district or community gone through in recent years that had an impact on students?
2. What types of changes do you see for students in the next 5-10 years?

3. What can the community do to improve student success in MC?
4. What types of activities are available for youth and young kids? What activities are needed?
5. How has SVPP impacted the educational system and families?

#### Community Character

1. What is MC's sense of identity? Architecture, public art, streetscape, landscape, music
2. What would you do to build on existing cultural assets?
3. What would you like to see DONE to increase tourism? How?

#### Land Use & Housing

1. What types of housing options does MC need? Why?
2. Where do you see the most residential/ retail/ commercial/ parks and open space uses in the future? (Maybe include map within this question, LAND USE MAP?)
3. How would you change the current growth trends (specify) of Mason City?
4. What types of green building practices are people using now or interested in using?

#### Transportation and Parks/Trails

1. What could be done to improve the connectivity of MC?
2. What could be done to improve the parks/trails in MC?

#### Environmental Resiliency

1. Has the city done enough to prevent flooding and other natural disaster events? How could it be improved?

#### Ending

1. Is there anything you want to add to your thoughts or anything important that we might have missed?
2. We all have big hopes for the city and its development. How do you think the community should pay for the amenities?

## Community Survey Questions

1. Which of the following statements best reflects your vision for Mason City?
  - A statewide leader in sustainability practices with thriving local businesses and employment opportunities for all. The community will work together towards a peaceful, culturally vibrant, resilient and family friendly place.
  - A premier North Iowa cultural destination, with a commitment to collaboration across sectors, successful families, enterprising local business, and a sustainable landscape to create a welcoming community.
  - A successful community that embraces interacting and caring for the natural environment, with opportunity for economic growth through green initiatives and marketing of sustainable living.
  - I have my own vision for the community \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. In what areas could Mason City become a statewide leader \_\_\_\_\_?  
Please Rank from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important)  
Iconic Architecture, Musical Heritage, Downtown revival (modern or historic), Agriculture, Manufacturing, Retail/shopping hub, Health care hub, Outdoor recreation, Tourism and entertainment, other\_\_\_\_\_

Mason City's population (2010 US Census) is 93.8% white. Mason City Community Schools' 2015-2016 minority enrollment is 18.86% (Iowa Dept. of Education.). The data suggests that minority families tend to be younger than the overall population.

3. What should Mason City do to become more inclusive of diverse populations? (Check up to 2)
  - More culturally diverse restaurants and businesses
  - More diverse cultural events
  - Support more minority representation on local boards
  - Increase resources for English Language Learners in the community
  - Increase resources for English Language Learners in the schools
  - Provide multicultural "welcome to the community" packets to new residents
  - Nothing
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

Mason City’s unemployment decreased 3% since the Great Recession, but the city lost over 700 jobs since 2010. Some cities are establishing financial incentives, such as TIF financing or property tax abatement, that align with their branding strategies to support new, high paying jobs.

- 4. How willing are you to support financial incentives for new and/or existing businesses if they commit to creating new jobs that pay livable wages?  
Very willing   somewhat willing   not willing
  
- 5. Would you like to see more public art and cultural facilities?
  - Yes, more art and cultural facilities owned and managed by the city
  - Yes, the city should support and invest more in public art projects
  - No, Mason City has enough public and cultural facilities.
  - No, I would like to see more privately-owned art and cultural facilities
  
- 6. What strategies would best support Mason City’s arts and cultural assets? (Check up to 2)
  - Creating a community arts and cultural commission
  - Developing neighborhood cultural plan(s) to build on local arts and cultural resources
  - Designate arts and cultural districts
  - Designate public sites for arts and cultural events
  - Create new city-sponsored cultural events and festivals
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 7. Which of the following rental types would you like to see more of in Mason City?
  - Multifamily apartment buildings
  - Mixed use buildings with commercial space on the ground floor and apartments above
  - Townhouses
  - Adding accessory dwelling units, such as granny flats or studios above garages, on existing properties

In general, Mason City has good air and water quality. Other areas of environmental sustainability include flood resiliency, energy efficiency, parks, trails, public trees, wildlife, and recycling.

8. What, if any, initiatives would you like to see to improve the environmental quality in the city: \_\_\_\_\_

A Sustainability Coalition is a group of community members, elected officials, and local leaders working together to identify and implement projects that improve the environment, economy, and social equity of the city.

9. Would you participate in a Mason City Sustainability Coalition?  
Yes    Maybe    No    Coalition not needed

Demographic questions:

- 1. Gender  
Male    Female    Other
  
- 2. Age  
18-34    35-54    55-70    70+
  
- 3. Ethnicity (check all that apply)  
White    Hispanic or Latino    Asian/Pacific Islander  
Black or African American    Native American or American Indian Other
  
- 4. Where do you live currently?  
Downtown/Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest
  
- 5. Do you currently rent or own your home?  
Rent    Own    Other
  
- 6. Are there children under the age of 18 living in your household?  
Yes    No

# Open House Posters

## MASON CITY SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

### Why Create a Sustainability Plan?

The Mason City Sustainability Plan is the first Mason City community-wide strategic plan focusing on sustainability. It serves as a starting point for community engagement and to stimulate dialogue among residents for envisioning a sustainable future for the community.

The plan focuses on economic prosperity, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Created in conjunction with the comprehensive plan update, the plan focuses on community assets to build a durable community identity.

Approaching new issues with long-term sustainability in mind creates more effective and strategic solutions. Best practices provide ideas for the community to be more sustainable.

#### Best Things in Mason City

Community	26%
Culture/Arts	21%
Shopping	10%
Parks	14%
Schools	11%
Health	8%
Raise Family	4%
Aging	4%
Jobs	1%

#### Frustrating Things in Mason City

Small Town	19%
Shopping	14%
Jobs	22%
Politics	12%
Crime	9%
Traffic	7%
Parking	6%
Park Plant	6%
Identity	1%
Schools	1%
Poverty	3%

#### Exceeds Standards

- 5.3% of residents walk or bike
- The EPA air quality index shows 0 days of unhealthy air
- Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation are strong exporting industries in Mason City
- The unemployment rate decreased from 6.8% to 3.9% (2010-2016)
- Mason City has 4 designated historic districts

#### Need Improvement

- Post-secondary educational attainment decreased (2009-2014)  
Bachelor's Degree: 21.6% to 20.9%  
Associate's Degree: 14.7% to 15.8%
- The city lost 47 business establishments (2009 to 2014)
- The number of people employed declined by about 700 (2010-2016)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency (66%) is 10% below the statewide average (2011-2016)
- Poverty rate (15.5%) is 3% higher than the statewide average
- Overall Graduation Rate (87.6%) is 3.2% below the statewide average

#### Focus Groups

- Business & Service Clubs
- Arts & Culture
- Faith Community
- Landmarks-Developers & Neighborhood Associations
- Social Service Agencies & Health
- Government & Law Enforcement
- Education

City of MASON CITY  
IOWA

Community Outreach & Regional Planning

IOWA INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

## A PROSPERING LOCAL ECONOMY

### The community will have a thriving local economy with livable wages for all

A sustainable economy includes diversified employment opportunities and efficient use of local resources, reducing the vulnerability to business closures and supply chain disruptions.

#### Community Quick Facts

##### Good Signs

- Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation are strong exporting industries in Mason City
- The unemployment rate decreased from 6.8% to 3.9% (2010-2016)

##### Local Businesses

- Catalyze the establishment and growth of small, locally owned businesses in areas identified by the Comprehensive Plan

##### Need Improvement

- Workforce Mobility: a decrease in post-secondary educational attainment (2009-2014)  
Bachelor's Degree: 21.6% to 20.9%  
Associate's Degree: 14.7% to 15.8%
- The city lost 47 business establishments (2009-2014)
- The number of people employed declined by about 700 (2010-2016)

##### Livable Wages

- Attract new businesses and expand existing businesses that fit in the community and increase the number of livable wage jobs

##### Industries that work for Mason City

- Establish a clear vision for the types of industries to attract and expand in the community; industries that fit with the current economic base and community identity, yet diversify and expand the products and services offered to the world.

##### What types of industries should Mason City attract?

##### What business characteristics fit in Mason City?

##### Opportunities for young professionals

- Provide rental housing options to attract young professionals
- Coordinate workforce needs with NIACC





# IDENTITY & PROCESS

## Who we are

The **best** things about Mason City are..



64 Interviews conducted

The top two **strengths** of Mason City are..

#1 Sense of community

#2 Art & Culture

8 Focus groups with 43 local experts

How do we become a better community?



The community will drive sustainability efforts through education and action with citizens and public leadership working together



**Community Coalition** – grass roots efforts working on sustainable projects

**Policy** – city policies & practices that promote sustainability

**Sustainability Council** – city led group dedicated to sustainability

What are your ideas?



Sign up today to be a part of Mason City sustainability!

Please take the **community survey** to shape the long-term economic, environmental, and cultural health and vitality of Mason City!

# STAR Community Rating

The table below shows the organization of our modified use of the STAR system for Mason City. The tables show the 26 indicators evaluated for Mason City:

Built and Natural Environment						
Community Outcome	Evaluation Measure	Mason City Before	Mason City Now	Change over time	Assessment category	Source
Drinking Water Quality	Part 1: Demonstrate that the community is not in violation of EPA's 5% standard for coliform bacteria in water pipes -- AND--		Water Quality Report shows no monthly samples with >5% coliform		Doing Well-Almost There	<a href="http://www.masoncity.net/pview.aspx?id=40322&amp;catid=0">http://www.masoncity.net/pview.aspx?id=40322&amp;catid=0</a>
	Option B: Decrease the amount of all regulated contaminants over time		Presence of measured pollutants in drinking water declined, including coliform bacteria (2012-2015)			<a href="http://www.masoncity.net/pview.aspx?id=40322&amp;catid=0">http://www.masoncity.net/pview.aspx?id=40322&amp;catid=0</a>
Safe Stormwater Management	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits have been obtained prior to discharging stormwater		Permit obtained 05/01/2016		Doing Well-Almost There	<a href="http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Water-Quality/NPDES-Wastewater-Permitting/Current-NPDES-Permits">http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Water-Quality/NPDES-Wastewater-Permitting/Current-NPDES-Permits</a>
Density & Destinations	Employment Desnsity: At least 25 jobs per acre		Maximum of 8.5		Need Improvement	Map in Appendix
Housing & Transportation Costs	80% of Census Block Groups where a household spends less than 45% on housing & transportation		Average for Mason City Block Groups: 52% of income spent on housing & transportation (25% Housing, 27% Transportation.	Overall Affordability: Households spend 52% of their income on housing & transportation.	Need Improvement	<a href="http://www.locationaffordability.info/lai.aspx">http://www.locationaffordability.info/lai.aspx</a>
Mode Split	Drove alone max: 60%		81.70%		Need Improvement	2010-2014 ACS
	Bike + walk + transit minimum: 25%		6.90%			
	Bike + walk minimum: 5%		5.30%		Exceeding Expectations	

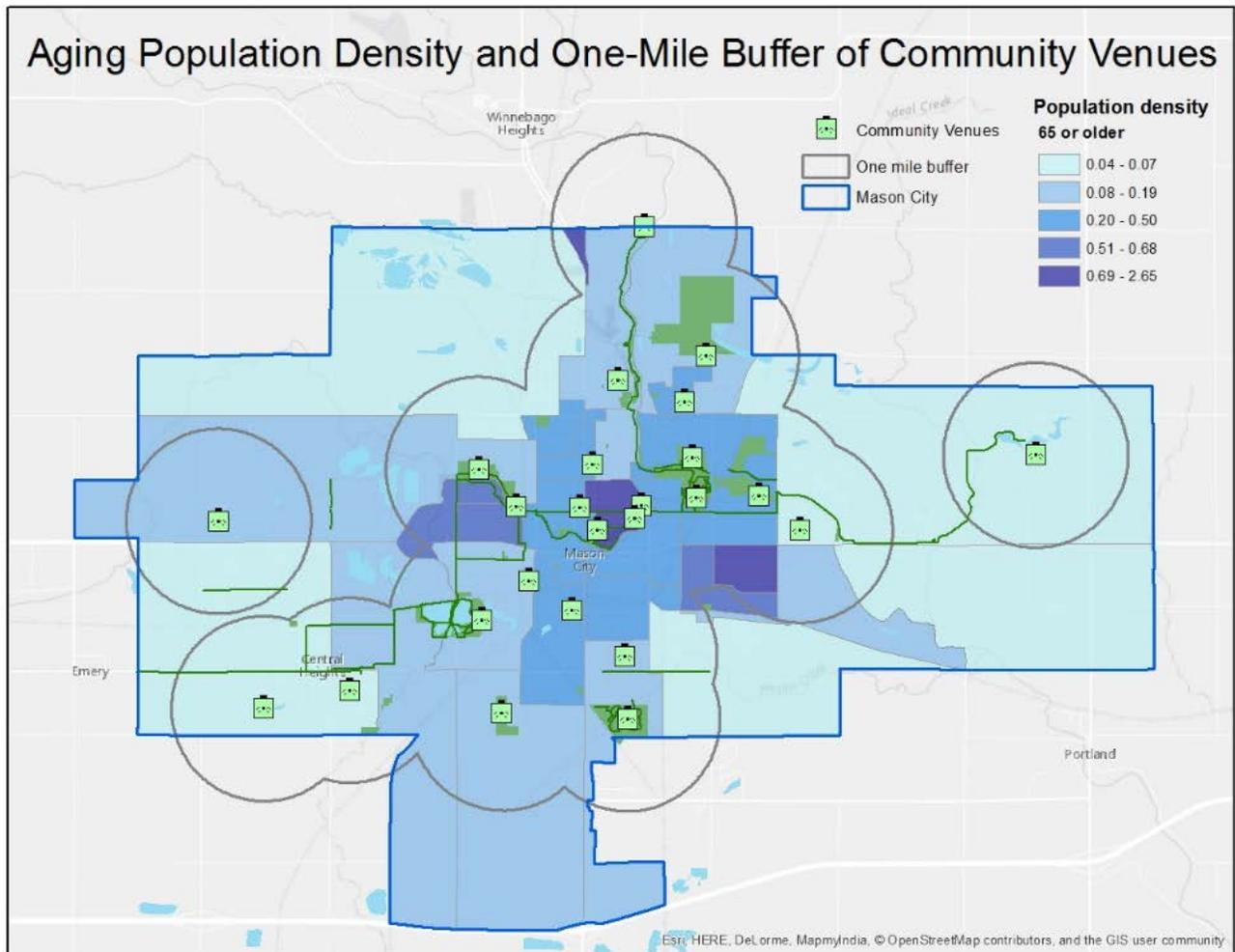
Concentration and Emissions	Option B: Decrease in annual concentration of non-attainment criteria pollutants that greatly affect human health (PM 2.5, PM 10, and Ozone)	2010: 362 days PM 10 was the Main Pollutant	2015: 357 days PM 10 was the Main Pollutant	5 fewer days where PM 10 was the Main Pollutant	Exceeding Expectations	<a href="https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/air-quality-index-report">https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/air-quality-index-report</a>
	Option B: Decrease in the annual number of days in which Air Quality Index (AQI) exceeds 100 over past 5 years	2010: 0 days with AQI over 100	2015: 0 days with AQI over 100	No Change		<a href="https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/air-quality-index-report">https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/air-quality-index-report</a>
Biological Integrity	Achieve a biological integrity rating of "Very Good" or "Good" based on EPA's 305(b) requirements for water bodies with designated uses		2010 - 2012 Assessment: Good Aquatic Life Support - Fully Fish Consumption - Fully Primary Contact Recreation - Not supporting		Exceeding Expectations	<a href="https://programs.iowadnr.gov/adbnet/assessment.aspx?aid=16934">https://programs.iowadnr.gov/adbnet/assessment.aspx?aid=16934</a>
Chemical Integrity - Usability	Option A: All non-industrial water bodies are swimmable and fishable during 90% of days in past year		Winnebago River is designated for Fish Consumption and warm water aquatic life uses, but not Primary Contact Recreation.		Need Improvement	<a href="https://programs.iowadnr.gov/adbnet/assessment.aspx?aid=16934">https://programs.iowadnr.gov/adbnet/assessment.aspx?aid=16934</a>

## A Prospering Local Economy

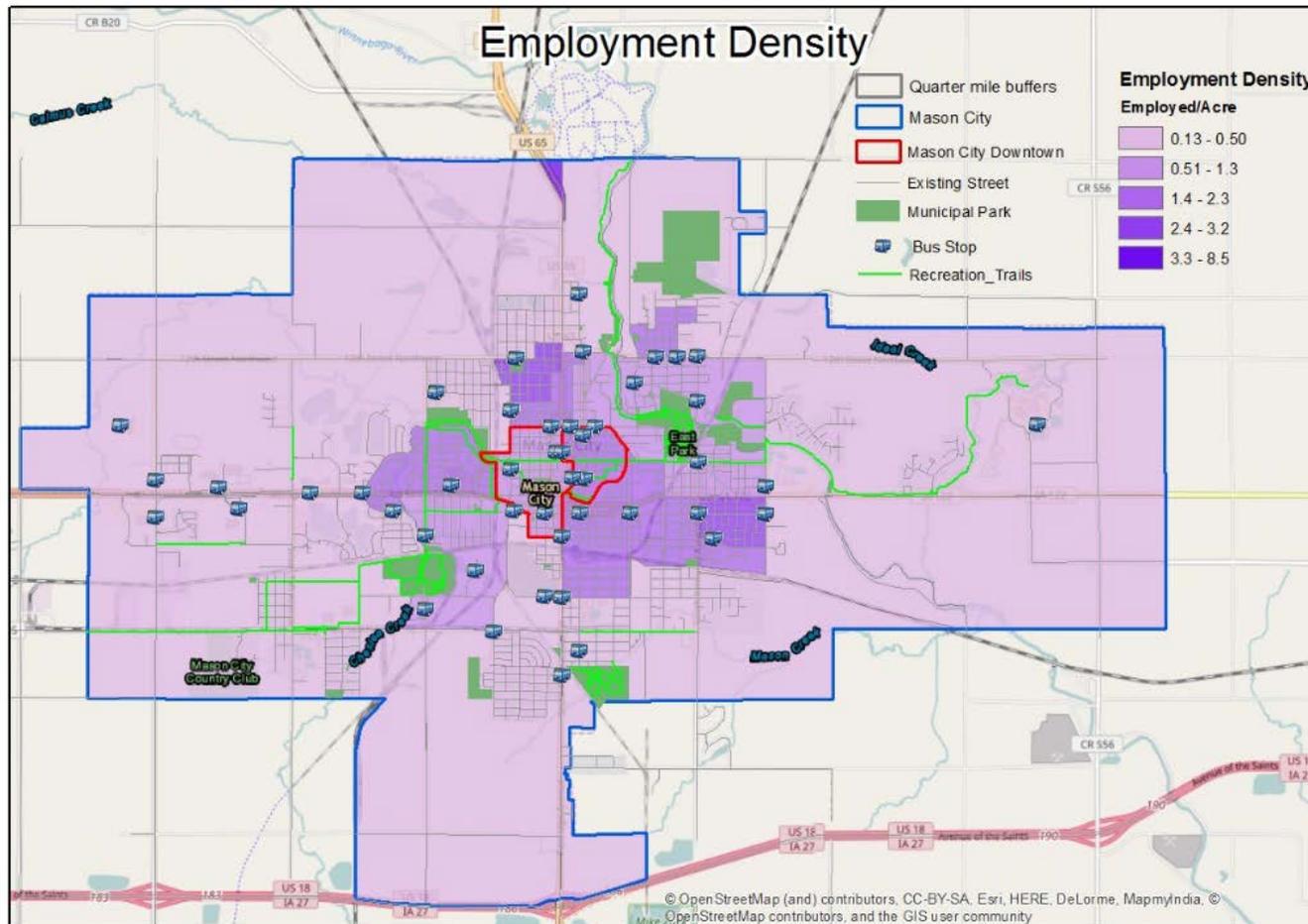
Theme	Evaluation Measure	Mason City Before	Mason City Now	Change over time	Assessment category	Comments/Sources
Local Businesses	Option A: Demonstrate an increased number of business establishments in the county over time	1435	1388		Need Improvement	Cerro Gordo County, 2009, 2014. County Business Patterns
Employment	Part 1: Demonstrate an increase in the percentage of residents employed over time	22884 out of 24568 employed	22167 out of 23063 employed	-717 fewer employed	Need Improvement	BLS labor force data by county, annual average, 2010, 2015
	Part 2: Demonstrate a decrease in the unemployment rate of residents over time [Partial credit available]	6.80%	3.90%	-2.90%	Exceeding Expectations	BLS labor force data by county, annual average, 2010, 2016
Community Self-Reliance	Demonstrate that 50% of import sectors have increasing location quotients over the past 3 years	Industries with LQ below 1: Nat resource/Mining 0.23, Construction 0.89, Finance 0.80, Prof Services 0.62, Leisure/hospitality 0.92	Industries with LQ below 1: Nat Resource/Mining 0.26, Construction 0.90, Information 0.98, Financial 0.81, Prof Services 0.57, Leisure/hospitality 0.85	All except prof services improved slightly for those below 1. Of those over 1, Information declined significantly, while health/edu saw largest growth	Doing Well-Almost There	BLS location quotient calculator, Cerro Gordo County, 2012, 2015
Median Household Income	Increase real median household income over time	\$40,706	\$42,009	\$1,303	Doing Well-Almost There	ACS, Mason City, 2010, 2014
Workforce Mobility	Demonstrate increased post-secondary educational attainment in the community over time	Bachelor's Degree: 21.6% Associates Degree: 14.7% (25 & over)	Bachelor's Degree: 20.9% Associates Degree: 15.8% (25 & over)	Bachelor: -0.7% Associates: +1.1%	Need Improvement	ACS, 2009, 2014, Mason City, Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Associate's Degree

Social Fairness and Inclusion						
Theme	Evaluation Measure	Mason City Before	Mason City Now	Change over time	Assessment category	Comments/Sources
Creative Industries	Demonstrate that creative industries represent at least a 5% share of all businesses in the county	3.48%	3.33%	-0.15%	Need Improvement	Percentage of Professional and Arts industries, BLS location quotient, Cerro Gordo County, 2015
Community Venues	Demonstrate that at least 75% of residents live within 1 mile of a community venue that is open to the public and offers free services and/or events for residents				Exceeding Expectations	Map in Appendix
Reading Proficiency	Demonstrate at least 85% of third grade public school students meet or exceed reading proficiency	71.50%	66.80%	-6.50%	Need Improvement	2010-2011 BEDS data compared to 2015-2016. <a href="https://www.educateiowa.gov/education-statistics#Student_Performance">https://www.educateiowa.gov/education-statistics#Student_Performance</a>
Graduation Rate	Option A: Achieve a 90% average 4-year adjusted cohort high school graduation rate for all public schools in the jurisdiction	88.40%	87.60%	-0.8	Need Improvement	Class 2015 Four-Year Graduation Rate Comparison to the Class 2010 Four-Year Graduation Rate. <a href="https://www.educateiowa.gov/documents/graduates/2016/06/class-2015-four-year-graduation-rate-comparison-class-2010-four-year">https://www.educateiowa.gov/documents/graduates/2016/06/class-2015-four-year-graduation-rate-comparison-class-2010-four-year</a>
Local Historic Districts	Designate at least one local historic district with specific design standards and a process for reviewing new projects		Mason City has five established Historic Districts		Exceeding Expectations	
Successful Aging	Option B: Achieve a Total Index Score of 60 or greater from the Livability Index		Livability Index Score 59		Doing Well-Almost There	<a href="https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/search#Mason+City+IA+50401+USA">https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/search#Mason+City+IA+50401+USA</a>

Voter Turnout Rate	Increase the percentage of voters participating in local elections over time	33% (2003)	36% (2013)	+3%	Doing Well-Almost There	<a href="http://www.co.cerro-gordo.ia.us/wp-content/uploads/auditor/2016-mason-city-special-election/Election%20Statistics.pdf?ts=1475117896">http://www.co.cerro-gordo.ia.us/wp-content/uploads/auditor/2016-mason-city-special-election/Election%20Statistics.pdf?ts=1475117896</a>
Poverty Reduction	Demonstrate progress towards a target of no residents living below the poverty line by 2025	All people living in poverty within last 12 months: 15.1% (2010)	All people living in poverty within last 12 months: 15.5% (2014)	+ .4%	Need Improvement	2010-2014 ACS
Equitable Poverty Reduction	Demonstrate a decrease over time in the percentage of residents living below the poverty line from at least 3 population subgroups	<b>2000: 65 &amp; Over</b> (10.1%); <b>Families with single-female householder</b> (23.4%); <b>Related Children under 18</b> (10.9%)	<b>2014: 65 &amp; Over</b> (10.2%); Families with single-female householder (24%) <b>Related Children under 18</b> (19.2%)	0.2%; 0.6%; and 8.3% increase in respective categories	Need Improvement	<a href="https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF">https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF</a>
National Incident Management System	Demonstrate that the community is in compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS)		Yes, Mason City cooperates with Cerro Gordo County Emergency Management for preparation and training in accordance with NIMS strategies		Doing Well-Almost There	**Cerro Gordo County emergency management website - <a href="http://www.masoncity.net/pview.aspx?id=18206&amp;catid=481">http://www.masoncity.net/pview.aspx?id=18206&amp;catid=481</a>
Violent Crime Rate	Demonstrate that the average violent crime rate for the past 3 years is below the following thresholds: • 5.5 homicides per 100,000 residents • 70 incidents of rape or attempted rape per 100,000 residents • 462.7 aggravated assaults per 100,000 residents	2013 (27,747 pop): 1 Homicide; 8 Rapes, 17 aggravated assault	2014 (27,618 pop): 0 Homicides; 5 Rapes, 16 Aggravated assault	2015 (27,312): 0 Homicides; 0 Rapes; 31 aggravated assault;	Doing Well-Almost There	<a href="https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-8/table-8-state-pieces/table-8-offenses-known-to-law-enforcement-iowa-by-city-2015.xls">https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-8/table-8-state-pieces/table-8-offenses-known-to-law-enforcement-iowa-by-city-2015.xls</a>



One of the satisfactory results indicated in the STAR rating system is the access to public spaces including community venues and municipal parks. Major community venues in the city include the public library, downtown venues, museums, parks, and schools. According to the map above, most community venues are located in the center of the city. Most of the elderly population is able to access at least one major community venue within the city within a one-mile walk.



The map above shows employment density and the distribution of bus stops. Public transit services are provided weekdays from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Most bus stops are located in the center and west corridor of the city. However, the employment density of jobs per acre shown is still far below the STAR standards a minimum of 25 jobs per acre within the downtown area (highlighted in red on the map).

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