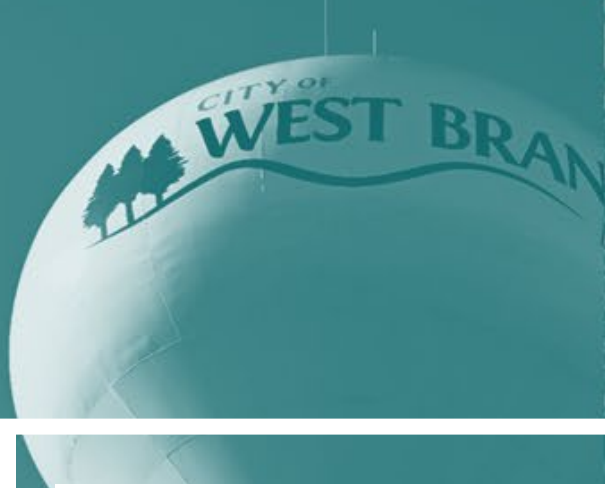




WEST BRANCH 2050

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

CREATED IN 2026 FOR THE CITY OF WEST BRANCH, IOWA



Acknowledgments

The West Branch 2050 Comprehensive Plan was completed through a partnership between the City of West Branch and the University of Iowa’s Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC). IISC provides the institutional framework and academic support that allows students to deliver a professional, research-based comprehensive plan while advancing sustainability and long-term resilience for the community partners.

A team of graduate students in the School of Planning and Public Affairs (SPPA) led the development of the plan. We conducted research, analyzed data, engaged with community members, and drafted goals and implementation strategies. We developed the plan in collaboration with City staff, local leaders, community stakeholders, and West Branch residents who generously shared their time, knowledge, and perspectives throughout the planning process.

The Housing and Historic Preservation chapters utilize work from two other SPPA graduate teams focused on those two topics. Additionally, a fiscal analysis study and capital improvement plan from another SPPA graduate team informed portions of this comprehensive plan.

We are grateful to everyone who participated in surveys, interviews, meetings, community events, and public engagement opportunities. These contributions helped ground the plan in local experience and provided important insight into West Branch’s current conditions, priorities, and long-term goals. Special thanks are extended to City staff, community stakeholders, faculty advisors, and student planning team members whose guidance and contributions supported the completion of this plan.

Project Team Members	Faculty Advisors & Alumni Mentor	West Branch Project Leads	Other SPPA Contributors
> Abdul Rashid Adam > Megan Anhalt > Emma Davis > Joe Maxwell > Lydia Rose > Gypsy Russ > Trevor Sippel	> Travis Kraus – IISC Director and Professor, School of Planning and Public Affairs > Bogdan Kapatsila – Assistant Professor, School and Planning and Public Affairs > Tara Walters – Alumni Mentor	> Adam Kofoed – West Branch City Administrator > John Fuller – Planning &Zoning Commissioner > Erin Monaghan –Parks & Recreation Commissioner	> Fern Bultema, Yihan Li, Alli Tubbs, Erik Woolsey > Carolyn Scherf Ryan, Karin Ulery, Yiru Wang, Autumn Williams > Thea Clennon, Seth Dickinson, Will Harter

WEST BRANCH



All photos in figures attributed to authors unless otherwise noted

Contents

Acknowledgments	1	Existing Conditions – Land Use	39	Transportation Vision & Goals	80
Introduction & Background.....	5	Population Growth Projection.....	41	Introduction	81
Introduction.....	6	Land Area Needs.....	42	Existing Conditions.....	82
West Branch History.....	8	Infill development.....	45	Future Considerations	92
Past and Current Planning Efforts.....	10	Future Land Use Plan.....	46	Conclusion	93
Demographic Profile	12	Future Considerations.....	49	Parks and Recreation.....	98
Public Engagement.....	19	Conclusion	50	Parks and Recreation Vision & Goals.....	98
Key Findings.....	21	Facilities & Infrastructure.....	53	Introduction	99
Conclusion.....	24	Facilities and Infrastructure Vision & Goals.....	53	Existing Conditions.....	100
Housing.....	25	Introduction.....	54	Best Practices.....	105
Housing Vision & Goals	25	Existing Conditions	55	Future Considerations	107
Introduction.....	26	Conclusion	60	Hazard Mitigation & Resilience.....	112
Existing Conditions – Housing	27	Economic Development.....	65	Resilience Vision & Goals.....	112
Housing Trends and Practices.....	32	Economic Development Vision & Goals.....	65	Introduction	113
Conclusion.....	33	Introduction.....	66	Critical Facilities	114
Land Use	37	Existing Conditions	67	Floodplains.....	115
Land Use Vision & Goals	37	Future Considerations.....	73	Natural Hazard Concerns.....	117
Introduction.....	38	Conclusion	75	Man-made Hazard Concerns	119
		Transportation	80	Conclusion	120

Historic Preservation.....	126	Key Recommendations.....	129	Appendix C Community Survey Questions	158
Historic Preservation Vision & Goals	126	Conclusion	131		
Introduction.....	127	Appendix A Sustainable Development Resource			
Existing Conditions	128	Guide	133		
Best Practices	128	Appendix B 2025 Population Calculations	156		



Chapter One

Introduction & Background

Introduction

West Branch is at an important moment in its development. With steady population growth, regional connectivity, and evolving housing and economic activity, the community is navigating a period of transition that will shape its long-term future.

Located along Interstate 80, on the western edge of Cedar County and the eastern border of Johnson County, West Branch has experienced active growth, demonstrating the need for a clear framework to guide development while preserving the character, small-town charm, and quality of life valued by residents.

The purpose of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan is to provide a roadmap for the future development of West Branch.

Community input is central to the planning process, helping to shape goals, strategies, and objectives that reflect local priorities and values.

The *West Branch 2050 Comprehensive Plan* serves as a guide for the future of the city over a 25-year period. Building on the 2013 and 2019 comprehensive plans, this update continues to

shape West Branch’s long-term vision and growth.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a community’s long-term guide for how it wants to grow and change over time. It outlines goals and strategies that shape land use, community and economic development, and quality of life for residents.

While not a regulatory document, a comprehensive plan serves as a tool for future zoning decisions, capital improvements, and local policies so that managed growth reflects the values and priorities of the community.

Comprehensive plans are an expression of a city’s values, priorities, and long-term vision. They guide decision-making across departments to encourage that growth supports the well-being of residents, the local economy, and the environment. Conversely, failing to plan can result in disorganized development that diminishes community character and inefficient use of public resources. Comprehensive plans are

often updated roughly every five years to reflect new circumstances.

Legal Justification

Iowa Code 202: Section 414.3 states that a city’s zoning and ordinance regulations “shall be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan” and designed to:

- preserve the availability of agricultural land;
- consider the protection of soil from wind and water erosion;
- encourage efficient urban development patterns;
- lessen congestion in the street;
- secure safety from fire, flood, panic, and other dangers;
- promote health and the general welfare;
- provide adequate light and air;
- prevent the overcrowding of land;
- avoid undue concentration of population;
- promote the conservation of energy resources;
- promote reasonable access to solar energy;

- › facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks, and other public requirements.

Goals and strategies adhere to Iowa’s Smart Planning Principles outlined in Iowa Code Section 18B.1. The ten smart planning principles include:

- **Collaboration:** Encourages government, community, and stakeholder involvement in planning and decision-making.
- **Efficiency, Transparency, and Consistency:** Promotes equitable and clear outcomes with predictable development rules.
- **Clean, Renewable, and Efficient Energy:** Prioritizes energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.
- **Occupational Diversity:** Promotes diverse job opportunities and entrepreneurial growth near existing infrastructure and housing.
- **Revitalization:** Favors the reuse of existing structures and town centers over new construction in undeveloped areas.
- **Housing Diversity:** Encourages a variety of housing options located near public transit and employment centers.

- **Community Character:** Protects the unique architectural and cultural identity of a community.
- **Natural Resources and Agricultural Protection:** Protects and restores agricultural land, natural resources, and historic landscapes.
- **Sustainable Design:** Promotes buildings and infrastructure that conserve resources and reduce waste.
- **Transportation Diversity:** Expands mobility options while reducing congestion and improving air quality.



Plan Structure

The plan is divided into chapters according to various sectors of community and economic development, supported by foundational information shared in the Introduction and Background chapter.

A vision statement and overarching goals are presented at the beginning of each chapter. More detailed goals, objective, and strategy tables appear at the end of each chapter.

Goals, objectives, and strategies were developed through extensive research, including public input from residents and key stakeholders, analysis of existing conditions, case study research, and best practices.

The conclusion of each chapter also lists more detailed research in appendices that both informed the planning process and points toward potential actions and initiatives for West Branch. In particular, the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A provides useful ideas and resources.

West Branch History

Indigenous Landscape and Early Stewardship

The City of West Branch is located on the ancestral and traditional homelands of the Meskwaki, Sauk, Ioway, and other Indigenous peoples who have stewarded this region for generations prior to European Settlement. These nations actively shaped the landscape through controlled burns, selective clearing, and sustainable agricultural practices. Techniques such as intercropping supported soil health and wildlife habitat and contributed to the open prairie environment that settlers later described as “unbroken wilderness.”

Indigenous presence and land management were continuous in portions of what is now Cedar County until the early 19th century. The Black Hawk cession (1833) and subsequent territorial establishment opened the area to settlement while displacing Native communities who had long managed local lands and waterways.

We recognize and respect the enduring cultural, historical, and spiritual connections these nations maintain with the land today.

This acknowledgment is offered in recognition of the histories, communities, and traditions that continue to shape the region and as a reminder of the importance of thoughtful stewardship, collaboration, and long-term planning for future generations.

Quaker Settlement and Community Foundations

Quaker families from Ohio, Indiana, and the Midwest arrived during the early 1850s, establishing a community grounded in mutual stewardship, education, and cooperative social values. Early settlers included Joseph Quaintance, Isaiah Morris, David Tatum, William Townsend, and Samuel Abbott.

During this period, James Townsend operated the “Traveler’s Rest,” a documented station on the Underground Railroad that assisted individuals escaping enslavement in the American South.

Abolitionist John Brown was welcomed at Travelers Rest, contributing to West Branch’s historic role in regional abolitionist activity.

Quaker institutions played a formative role in early civic life, including education, religious meetings, and community support networks. Local history also documents interactions and schooling involving Native residents well into the early 20th century. By 1853, additional families, including members of the Hoover and Townsend families, expanded farming and began developing small businesses, postal services, and early transportation facilities.

West Branch is also well-known as the birthplace of Herbert Hoover, who served as the 31st President of the United States. The Herbert Hoover National Historic Site and the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, which opened to the public in 1962, continue to shape the community’s cultural and historic identity, providing national recognition and heritage tourism opportunities.

Rail Connections and Economic Growth

West Branch experienced substantial economic growth beginning in 1870 with the arrival of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railroad. The town became a regional connection point between major urban centers including Chicago, St. Louis, Omaha, and Minneapolis. Rail access accelerated agricultural commerce, local industry, and population growth, functioning similarly to the role Interstate 80 plays today.

Telephone service expanded beginning in 1870, and by 1883 residents could place calls to Iowa City, Davenport, and Cedar Rapids. The city incorporated in 1875, and the *West Branch Times* began publication the same year, marking the establishment of permanent civic institutions.

Early Urban Development and Public Improvements

By the 1870s and 1880s, Main Street developed into the commercial core with hotels, general stores, grain facilities, and small manufacturing.

In 1880, voters approved construction of a wooden sidewalk and stone-based gutters, followed by street lighting in 1883.

Between 1890 and the early 1900s, many original wooden buildings were replaced with more permanent brick structures, several of which remain in the downtown historic area. Cultural events, including early Chautauqua gatherings, reflect the religious and social influence of Methodist and Quaker communities during this period.

A major fire in January 1925 damaged the business block at Main and Downey Streets; reconstruction reinforced the durable building forms that characterize downtown today.

Historic Preservation and National Recognition

The West Branch Commercial Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. Preservation of historic structures, streetscape character, and built-form patterns

remains an important component of community identity. The city's association with President Herbert Hoover and the proximity of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site contribute to a unique cultural and historic setting within the region.

Contemporary Development Context

West Branch continues to function as a regional crossroads, historically linked by rail and now by Interstate 80. The city occupies a strategic location near the Iowa City metropolitan region, offering small-town character with convenient access to regional employment centers.

Recent residential development pressure from the metropolitan area has generated interest in expanded housing, infrastructure, and public services. These trends present opportunities for growth while elevating the importance of preserving community character, historic resources, and the small-town identity that has defined West Branch since its founding.

Past and Current Planning Efforts

The *West Branch 2050 Comprehensive Plan* builds on local and regional planning efforts that have shaped the community’s development over time. Previous plans established priorities related to growth management, transportation, parks and recreation, historic preservation, and community service. The previous planning efforts offer valuable insights that inform this planning process and plan development. Additionally, several other planning efforts happening concurrently through the University of Iowa’s Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC) contributed significantly to this comprehensive plan. Those other projects, completed by graduate students in the School of Planning and Public Affairs (SPPA), include a Capital Improvement Plan, an update to the Historic Preservation Plan, and a Housing Study.

2010 Community Trails Plan

The 2010 trails plan, completed by a council-appointed ad-hoc committee, argued that trails would make the community more attractive to outsiders and provide health benefits to residents. They sought to elevate the importance of trail development in the community with a goal that it” become part of the city’s comprehensive plan that guides future growth and development of the community.”

The document informed this planning process by providing baseline concepts of trail connectivity throughout West Branch, particularly with extensions and linkages to the Hoover Nature Trail and pedestrian infrastructure connecting residential areas to the school campus.

2017 Historic Preservation Plan

The Historic Preservation Plan reinforced the importance of historic resources as one of West Branch’s defining community assets. Recommendations related to preserving historic character, improving accessibility, increasing public awareness, and supporting heritage tourism informed land use and downtown development strategies within the 2025 Comprehensive Plan. The plan continues to guide efforts to balance future growth with preservation of the community’s cultural identity and historic landmarks.

2019 Comprehensive Plan

The 2019 Comprehensive Plan has guided West Branch’s growth, development, and community character in recent years. The plan incorporates extensive public input to identify community strengths, challenges, and priorities. The document established goals and policies for land use, housing, transportation, parks, and economic development. Strategies included connecting trail systems and improving historic preservation to improve quality of life for residents while maintaining orderly growth. Its recommendations have supported City efforts to prioritize projects, pursue funding opportunities, and manage growth, contributing directly to the direction and priorities of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan.

2024 Parks and Recreation Plan

The Parks and Recreation Plan informed recommendations related to improving green space, expanding recreational amenities, and strengthening connections between parks, neighborhoods, and trails. Community engagement conducted during the planning process identified strong support for additional recreational facilities, trail improvements, and gathering spaces. These priorities influenced recommendations in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan focused on enhancing quality of life, supporting active transportation, and maintaining accessible public spaces as the community grows.

2025 Library Strategic Plan

The Library Strategic Plan highlighted the library’s role as an important community gathering space that supports education, social connection, and public engagement. Priorities related to expanding programming, improving accessibility, and addressing space and facility needs informed broader community development goals within the Comprehensive Plan. The plan also reinforced the importance of investing in public spaces and services that strengthen community interaction and inclusivity.

County and Regional Planning

The Cedar County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2018, provides insights about land use in the areas surrounding West Branch, and components of the 2021 Cedar County Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan were integrated into this comprehensive plan. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan developed by the Eastern Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA) provided insight into broad economic development needs and opportunities throughout the region. Regional transportation planning efforts prepared by East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG), including the 2022 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and 2027-2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), informed the transportation recommendations by providing regional context for infrastructure planning and mobility priorities.



Demographic Profile

A note about the data in this chapter: unless otherwise specified, data from the years 2010 and 2020 are from the U.S. decennial census, and 2024 data comes from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 – 2024 five-year estimates.

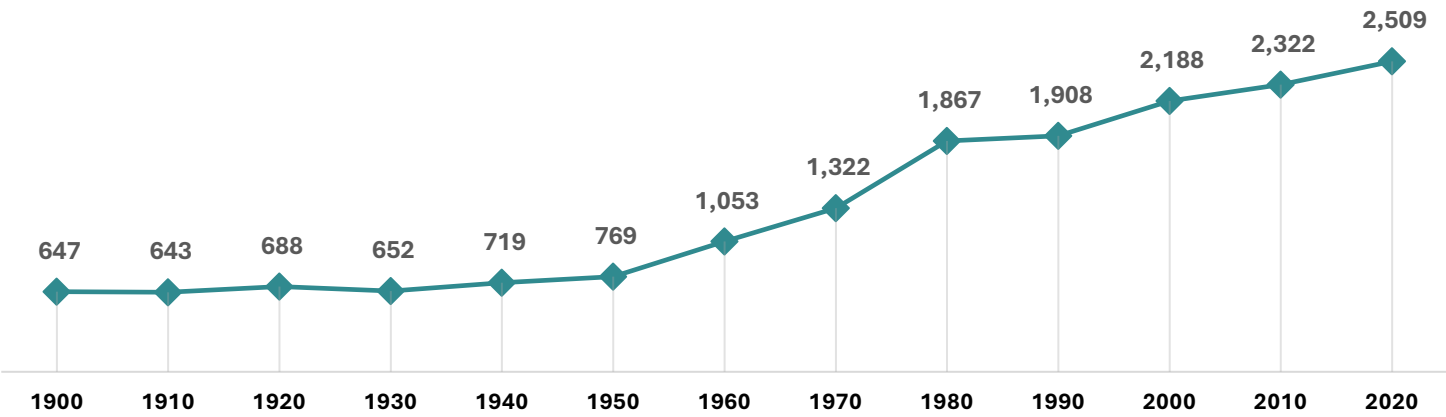
The demographic profile of West Branch provides a foundation for understanding the characteristics of the community today, how the community is changing, and the trends that will influence planning decisions through the year 2050. These insights highlight West Branch’s role as a small but dynamic community that balances small-town character with strong regional ties.

Demographic data is essential for designing policies that meet current needs while anticipating future demands for housing, infrastructure, transportation, public services, and land use.

Population

West Branch’s population has grown steadily since 1900, as shown in decennial census counts

Figure 1.1: West Branch Decennial Census Population 1900-2020



on Figure 1.1. The 1970’s was a period of rapid growth, and the population has maintained an upward trajectory over the last four decades. Since 2020, when West Branch had a population of 2,509, the city has experienced rapid growth. The most recent 2024 ACS estimates suggest the population has grown to 2,594 (an increase of 85 residents). However, these estimates do not seem to account for the large number of housing units built in recent years (312 residential building permits were granted after the census count through the end of 2025). The project team used building permit data since 2020 and average

household size to obtain a more accurate estimate of the population in 2025. The analysis is explained in more detail in Appendix B. With 312 new housing units constructed since 2020 and an average of 2.43 residents per household, the population increased by an estimated 758 residents since 2020, resulting in a **total population estimate of 3,267 in 2025.**

This analysis compares West Branch to ten “peer” cities to help provide context for the city’s growth rates, as shown in Table 1.1. Earlham, Mitchellville, and Tiffin were chosen as peer communities for their proximity to I-80 and a larger metro area,

similar to West Branch’s connection to the Iowa City metro region. Tiffin demonstrates a high growth scenario that could hypothetically occur in West Branch. Durant, Solon, Tipton, Wilton, and Williamsburg have similar characteristics as West Branch, and are close in proximity. Finally, Bellevue and Mount Vernon are peer communities due to their small-town atmosphere and notable tourism and historic influence.

Using the 2025 estimated population, West Branch has grown by about 45% in the last two and a half decades. Among peer communities, West Branch has experienced a higher percentage of population growth than most. Solon and Tiffin, both in Johnson County, have higher growth percentages and are among the fastest growing cities in the state.

When considering changes since the most recent Census count in 2020, West Branch has experienced accelerated growth relative to historical trends and even peer communities. One online population tracker shows West Branch as the seventh fastest growing city in Iowa (World Population Review, accessed July 2026).

Table 1.1 Population Changes Among Peer Cities					
	2000	2010	2020	2024	% Change 2000-2024
West Branch	2,253	2,322	2,509	3,267*	45.0%*
Durant	1,677	1,831	1,871	1,946	16.0%
Solon	1,177	2,037	3,018	3,152	167.8%
Tipton	3,155	3,221	3,149	3,106	-1.6%
Wilton	2,842	2,802	2,924	2,920	2.7%
Williamsburg	2,622	3,068	3,346	3,360	28.1%
Mitchellville	1,808	2,148	2,485	2,579	42.6%
Tiffin	975	1,947	4,512	5,737	488.4%
Earlham	544	571	1,410	1,528	180.9%
Bellevue	2,237	2,132	2,363	2,259	1.0%
Mount Vernon	3,808	4,506	4,527	4,513	18.5%

**The most recent West Branch data used for comparison purposes is the estimated 2025 population determined by the 2020 census and building permit information, as described on the previous page, rather than ACS estimates. All other cities show 2024 ACS 5-year estimates (the most recent data).*

Age and Gender

Trends in age can play an important role in long range planning. Communities that are trending older may need more senior services and amenities, while communities with young populations may need more family-oriented amenities.

Figure 1.2 shows population proportions by ten-year age brackets in West Branch, the Iowa City Metro, and the State of Iowa for 2024. The estimates show that West Branch has a larger share of residents in their 20s and 30s compared to the state of Iowa (but much smaller than the Iowa City metro, which is home to many college-aged residents). West Branch also has smaller proportions of residents of senior age compared to the rest of the state. The 2024 median age of 36.7 years is higher than that of the Iowa City Metro area at 32.1 years, but lower than the state median of 38.6 years. West Branch’s median age has dropped since the 2020 census, when it was 41.0 years, likely reflecting younger families moving to the community.

Figure 1.3 shows the age distribution in West Branch as of 2024. The share of residents under 18

is 23.6%, which is slightly higher than the state average 22.9%, while the share of older adults over the age of 65 at 16.7% is slightly lower than the statewide proportion of 18.1%.

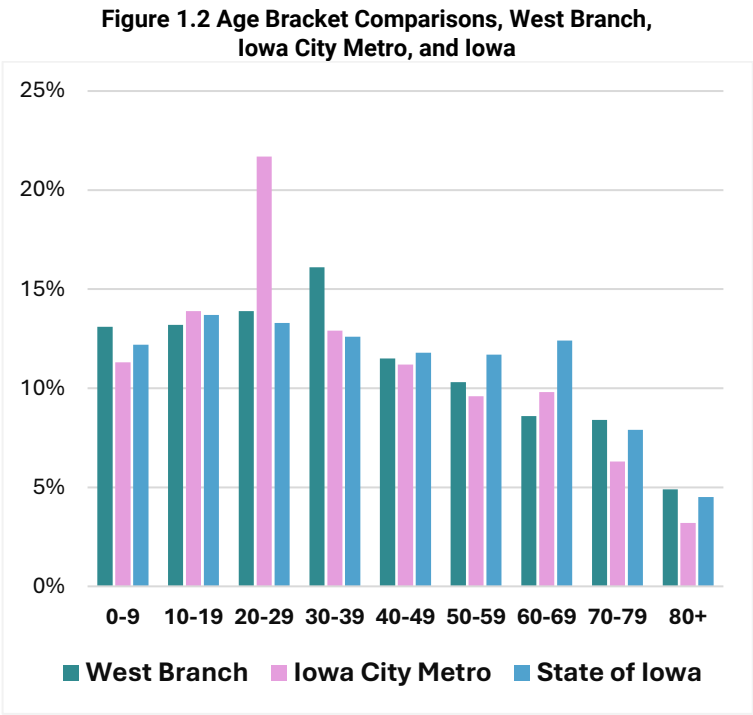


Figure 1.4 shows how the trends of age distribution have changed by showing 2010, 2020, and 2024. The graph shows that West Branch’s population, while relatively young compared to

the state, has trended older over time. The share of residents ages 0–9 declined from 17.4% in 2010 to 13.1% in 2024. The 30–39 age group increased from 12.8% to 16.1% over the same period. The 60–69 cohort rose from 7.3% in 2010 to 14.1% in 2020 before declining to 8.6% in 2024. The 70–79 age group increased from 5.5% in 2010 to 8.4% in 2024. Most other age groups experienced moderate fluctuations over the three time periods. This trend is not uncommon, as the large baby boomer generation reaches the higher age brackets.

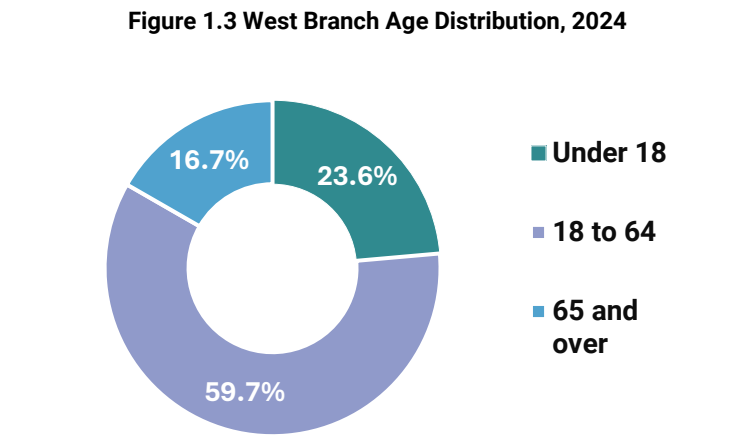


Figure 1.4 West Branch Age Distribution, 2010, 2020, and 2024

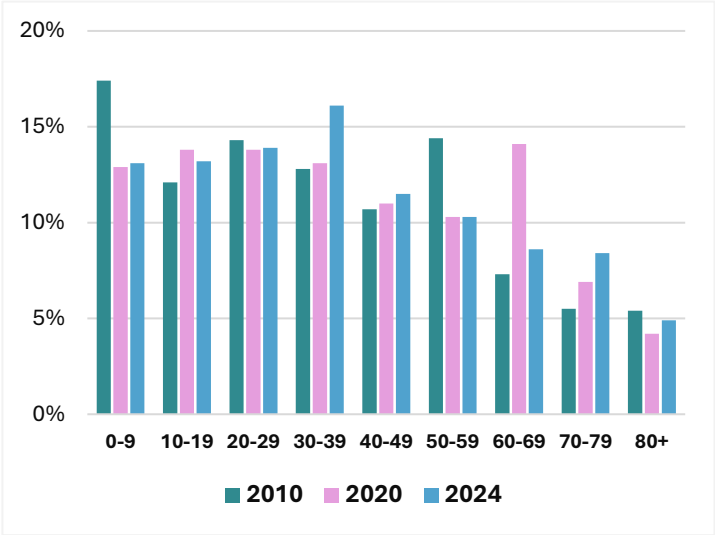
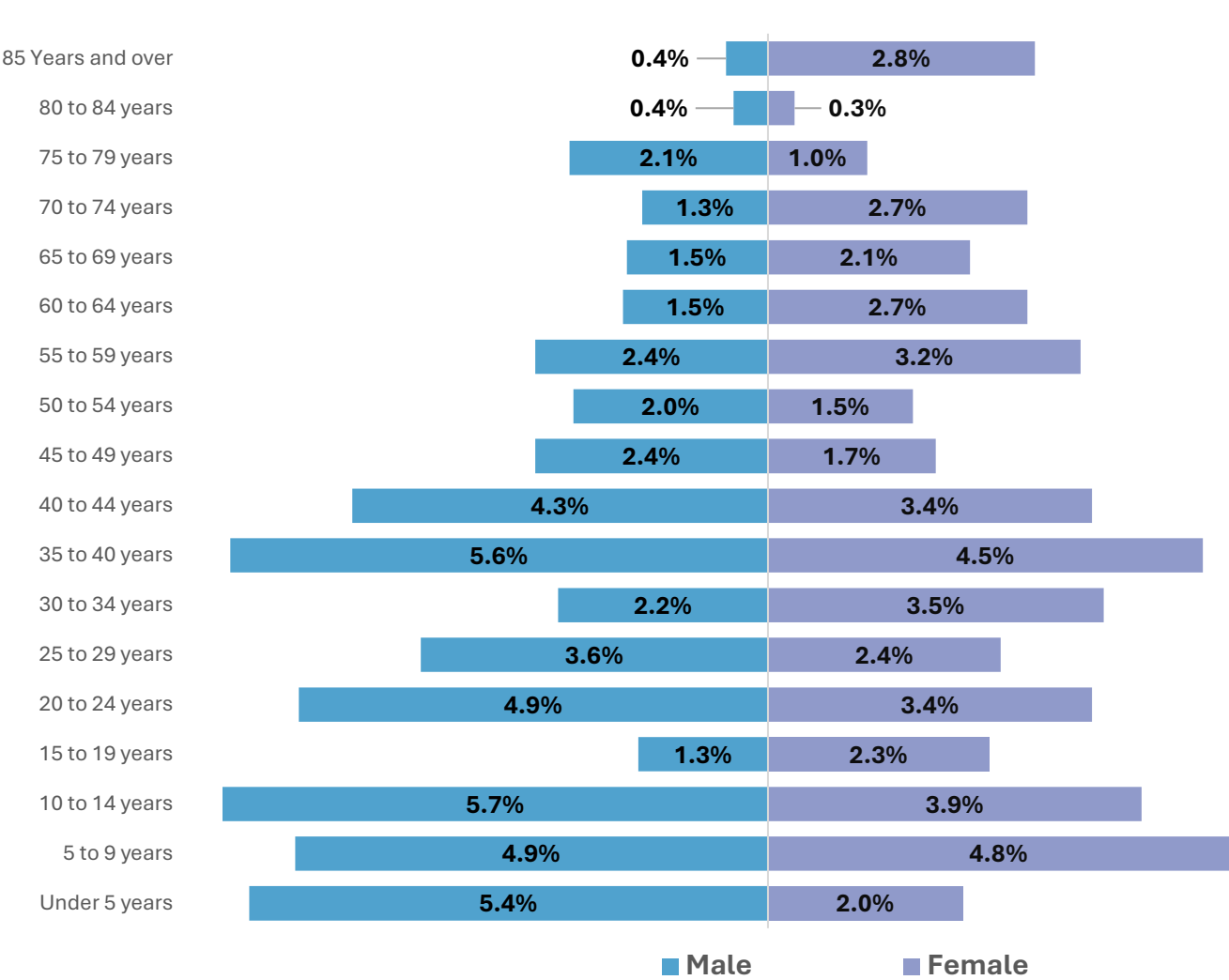


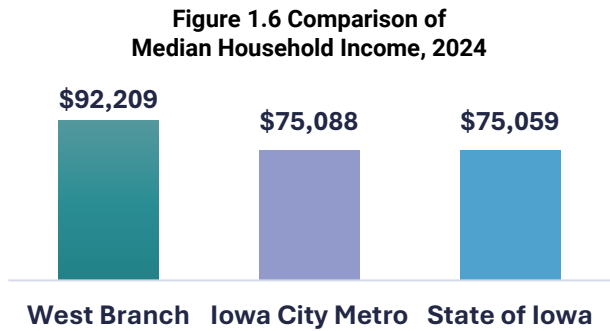
Figure 1.5 provides population distribution by age and binary gender. The age structure of West Branch shows a strong presence of children, teens, and working-age adults. The largest cohorts are residents between the ages of 25 and 44. Younger school-age groups are also well represented, which aligns with recent residential growth. Older adult populations are smaller in comparison. The gender distribution in West Branch is nearly balanced without notable gender-based demographic imbalances.

Figure 1.5 Comparison of West Branch Distribution by Age and Gender, 2024

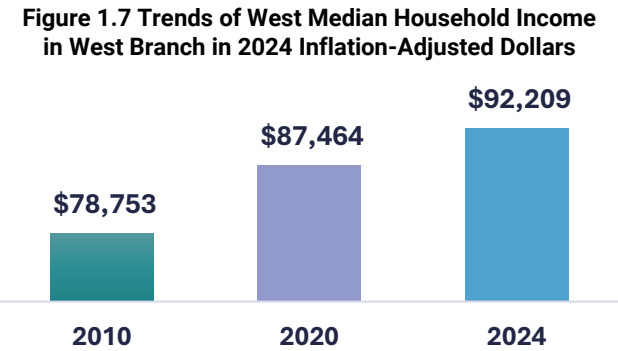


Income

West Branch has a higher median household income (\$92,209) than both the Iowa City Metro area (\$75,088) and the State of Iowa (\$75,059), as shown in Figure 1.6.



Median household income in West Branch has increased over the last two decades, as shown in Figure 1.7.



Transportation

Table 1.2 shows transportation modes and commute times for West Branch, the Iowa City metro, and the state. Most residents in West Branch drive alone to work, with very limited use of transit, biking, or walking. West Branch workers spend more time getting to work than residents of the Iowa City Metro area as well as the rest of the state on average. The statistics are not unexpected, however, since many residents work outside of West Branch. Work-from-home rates are comparable to the most recent statewide average.

Table 1.2 Transportation Modes and Commute Times for West Branch, Iowa City Metro, and State of Iowa, 2024

	West Branch	Iowa City Metro	State of Iowa
Drove alone	82.5%	66.6%	76%
Worked from home	11.4%	13.2%	11.3%
All other modes combined	~6.2%	~20.2%	~12.7%
Average travel time to work (minutes)	23.9	20	19.8

Households Characteristics

Households in West Branch are predominantly family-oriented, with married-couple households making up about 52.9% of all households, closely resembling statewide trends.

As shown in Table 1.3, the share of residents who are currently married is consistent with statewide patterns, reinforcing the community’s family-oriented identity. However, West Branch also has a notably higher share of never-married men (41.1% vs. 34.7% statewide). The city also has a lower share of divorced males compared to the state average. In contrast, widowed females represent a slightly larger share of the population than in Iowa overall.

Table 1.3 - Marital Status

	West Branch	State of Iowa
Married-Couple Households	52.9%	51.9%
Never Married (Male)	41.1%	34.7%
Never Married (Female)	28.4%	28.1%
Divorced (Male)	5.6%	9.8%
Widowed (Female)	9.6%	8.8%

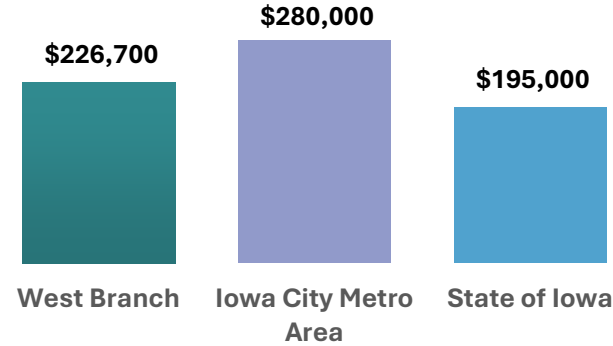
The average household size (2.4 people per household) matches the state average and has remained relatively stable in recent decades.

Table 1.4 - Households & Housing

	West Branch	Iowa City Metro	State of Iowa
Number of Households	1,040	72,313	1,437,699
Average Household Size	2.4	2.4	2.4

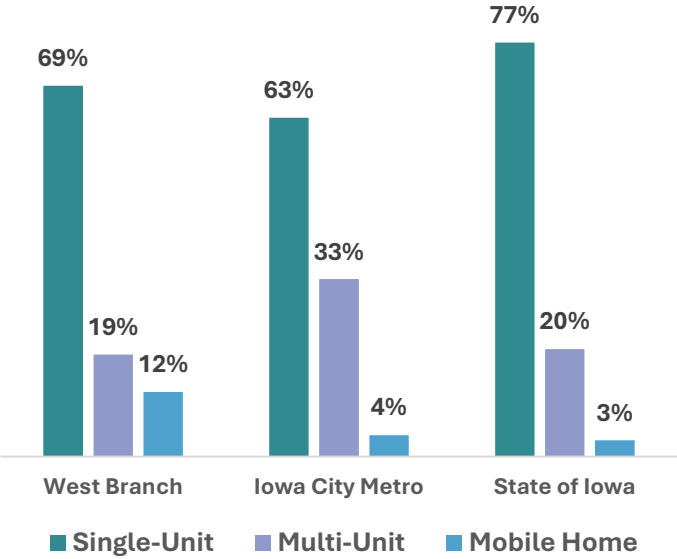
The median value of owner-occupied households is \$226,700, which is 20 percent lower than the Iowa City Metro Area (\$280,000), and 20 percent higher than the State of Iowa’s (\$195,000).

Figure 1.8- Median Value of Owner-Occupied Households.



As shown in Figure 1.9, West Branch has a lower share of single-unit homes compared to the state overall (69% vs. 77%), and a significantly higher share of mobile homes (12% vs. 3%). West Branch offers a level of housing diversity not always present in small Iowa communities.

Figure 1.9 - Housing Structure-Type Comparison



Population mobility in West Branch is strongly shaped by its role as a corridor community within the Iowa City metropolitan region as shown in Table 1.5. Although 73.5% of residents remained in

the same home as last year, a notable 19% of movers came from within the same county, nearly double the statewide rate (6.9%).

Table 1.5 - Migration Patterns

Geographic Mobility	West Branch	Iowa City Metro	State of Iowa
Same House Year Ago	73.5%	78.2%	86.8%
From Same County	19.0%	10.7%	6.9%
From Different County	5.4%	6.1%	3.7%
From Different State	1.9%	4.2%	2.3%
From Abroad	0.3%	0.8%	0.4%

These local migration flows align closely with West Branch’s housing characteristics. West Branch offers relatively attainable housing options while remaining within a reasonable commute of major employment centers. As a result, households may be moving to West Branch for its combination of housing affordability, small-town character, and access to regional job markets via I-80. A small share of residents moved from out of state (1.9%) or from abroad (0.3%), suggesting that population change is primarily driven by regional mobility rather than long-distance migration.

Race and Ethnicity

Like many small towns in Iowa, West Branch’s racial makeup is predominantly white. Table 1.6 shows the 2024 racial and ethnic makeup of West Branch, the Iowa City metro, and the state. At 96%, West Branch has a much higher percentage of white residents than the metro or state. The second largest racial category in West Branch includes residents who identify as two or more races (3.3%). In terms of ethnicity, Hispanic or Latino residents make up 3.7% of the West Branch population, which is also smaller than the metro and state.

Table 1.6 – Race and Ethnicity			
	West Branch	Iowa City Metro	State of Iowa
White	96.0%	78.1%	84.1%
Black or African American	0.3%	6.9%	3.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0%	0.2%	0.4%
Asian	0.3%	5.0%	2.5%
Some Other Race	0.0%	2.5%	2.6%
Two or More Races	3.3%	7.4%	6.6%
Hispanic or Latino	3.7%	6.9%	7.3%

Educational Attainment

Figure 1.10 shows the comparison of educational attainment in West Branch, the Iowa City metro, and the state. West Branch has a higher share of residents with some college education (35.4%) compared to both the metro area (26.6%) and the state (31.8%). The city has a slightly higher percentage of residents holding bachelor’s degrees (23%) compared to the State of Iowa (20.3%), but less than the Iowa City Metro Area. Graduate degrees obtained by residents of West Branch (8.9%) are considerably less than the Iowa City Metro area (22%), but comparable to the State of Iowa (10.5%).

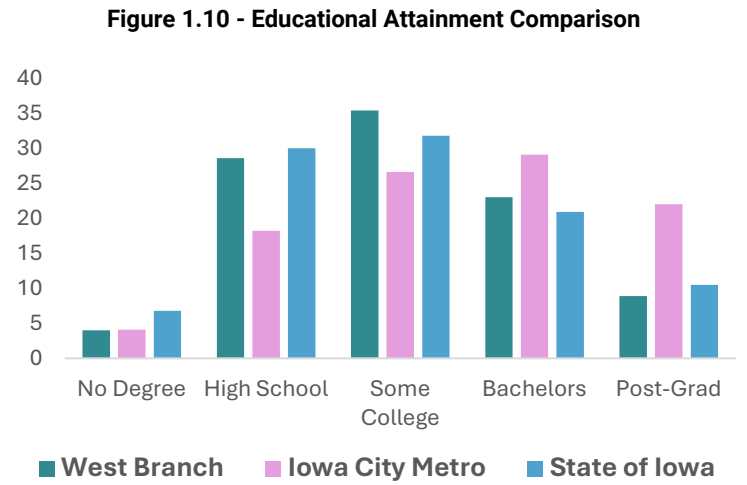


Photo Courtesy of Main Street West Branch

Public Engagement

Public engagement is a central component of the comprehensive planning process. It provides the foundation for understanding community priorities, identifying local challenges, and shaping policies that reflect the needs and values of West Branch residents.

Engagement activities were conducted throughout the planning process using a range of methods designed to reach different segments of the community. These included participation in local events, an open house, a community-wide survey, and a virtual webinar. Together, these efforts provided both broad input and more detailed feedback to inform plan development.

The engagement approach emphasized relevance, accessibility, equity, and transparency. Activities were designed to reflect issues important to residents, provide multiple opportunities for participation, and ensure that community feedback informed the final plan.

Members of the public engaged with the planning team through both in-person and online formats.

Homecoming Football Game



The planning team hosted an informational table at the West Branch homecoming football game. This event provided an opportunity to introduce the planning process and gather initial community input in an informal setting.

Approximately 60 individuals participated in guided conversations focused on future growth, community priorities, and desired improvements. Feedback collected at this event helped establish an early understanding of community values and informed subsequent engagement efforts.

Fall Fest Pumpkin Party



West Branch residents also had an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions during a tabling event at West Branch's annual Fall Fest, which featured interactive activities and informal discussions.

Activities included a "Bean Poll" polling exercise on preferred growth scenarios and an idea board used to identify important community spaces. Over 30 individuals participated directly, with additional residents contributing through conversations. Input from this event helped refine survey questions and identify recurring themes.

Open House



An open house at the Black Rose Bookstore in downtown West Branch provided an opportunity for residents to weigh in on a variety of community topics.

Participants reviewed materials and provided feedback on:

- Growth and land use scenarios
- Housing preferences
- Previous planning efforts
- Capital improvement priorities

The open house allowed for more detailed discussion and helped validate trends observed during earlier engagement activities.

Future Land Use Mapping



One of the most popular stations was the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) area, where residents had the opportunity to do a hands-on spatial activity.

The map on display showed both current land use and current zoning. Future land use development provides an opportunity to consider how the community might develop over time. Residents placed various land use tokens (e.g. parks, trails, commercial nodes, housing developments, etc.) on the map indicating their preferences for land use changes. They could also offer suggestions by placing sticky notes on the map.

Community Survey

Residents provided input about current conditions and their hopes for the future of West Branch through a community-wide survey. Survey topics included key issues such as growth, housing, transportation, economic development, and quality of life in West Branch. The survey was distributed through both online and in-person engagement efforts and received nearly two hundred responses. The survey provided a structured method for collecting feedback across a wide range of topics and helped validate trends identified during earlier engagement activities. Survey questions are included in Appendix C.

Webinar

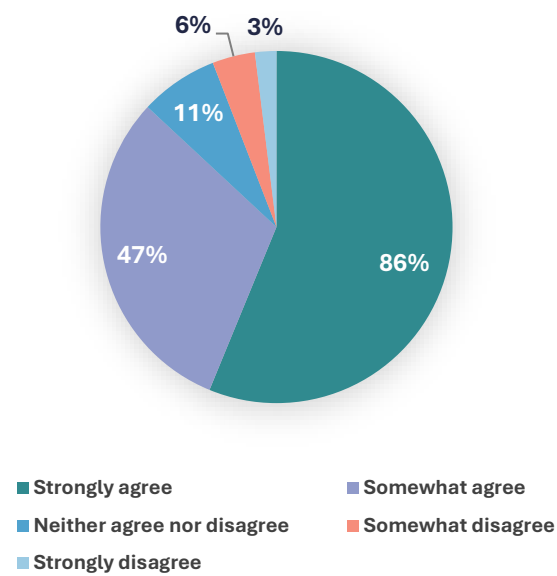
Residents and stakeholders could preview and provide feedback on preliminary goals and strategies during a virtual webinar. Presenters shared elements from the draft plan to provide an additional opportunity for public input as the deliverable approached the conclusionary phases. The webinar summarized key findings, introduced preliminary recommendations, and allowed participants to ask questions and share feedback.

Key Findings

Community Character

Survey responses indicate very high satisfaction with West Branch as a place to live (Figure 1.11). A strong majority of respondents expressed positive views on overall quality of life, the community atmosphere, and West Branch as a place to raise children.

Figure 1.11 Community Satisfaction

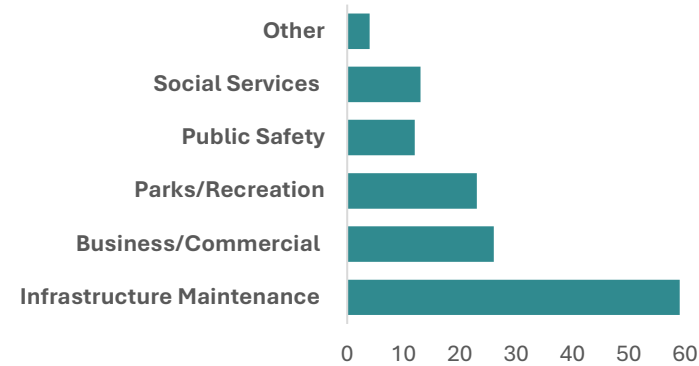


Residents consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining West Branch’s small-town identity, sense of community, and livability as future growth occurs.

Growth and Investment Priorities

Residents identified infrastructure maintenance as the most important priority for future investment, significantly exceeding all other categories (Figure 1.12). Key priorities include road and street maintenance, water and sewer infrastructure, and sidewalks and pedestrian facilities.

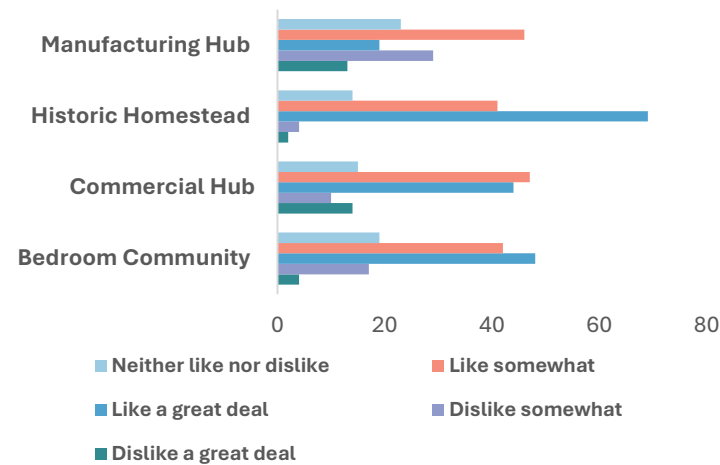
Figure 1.12 Investment Priorities



Growth Preferences and Community Direction

Responses to growth scenarios indicate that residents favor a balanced and controlled approach to growth (Figure 1.13). Common themes include support for gradual and well-managed development, concern about rapid growth patterns seen in nearby communities such as Tiffin and North Liberty, and desire to maintain community identity and character.

Figure 1.13 Growth Scenario Preferences



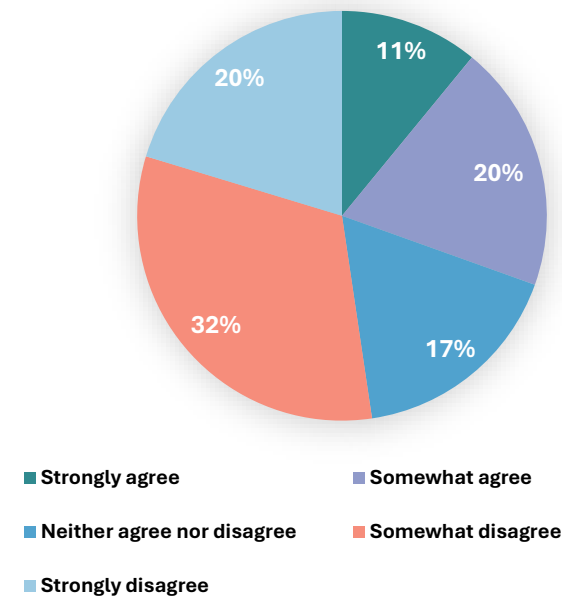
Housing

Housing emerged as one of the most significant concerns among respondents (Figure 1.14). Survey responses and open-ended comments indicate concern about rising housing costs, limited availability of affordable housing options, and demand for a broader mix of housing types. Residents frequently expressed a desire for more affordable single-family homes, housing options for seniors, and development that maintains neighborhood character. Open-ended responses further illustrate these concerns:

“We moved to West Branch for the small-town atmosphere... we don’t want the expansion that nearby communities are experiencing.”

“There are new homes being built, but they are not affordable for many families... more middle-range housing is needed.”

Figure 1.14 Responses to the statement: West Branch provides adequate affordable housing



Transportation

Transportation-related responses emphasize the importance of maintaining and improving existing infrastructure (Figure 1.15). Residents identified well-maintained roads, sidewalks and pedestrian safety, safe crossings for pedestrians and bicyclists, and connectivity between neighborhoods as highly important.

Figure 1.15 Importance of Transportation System Components

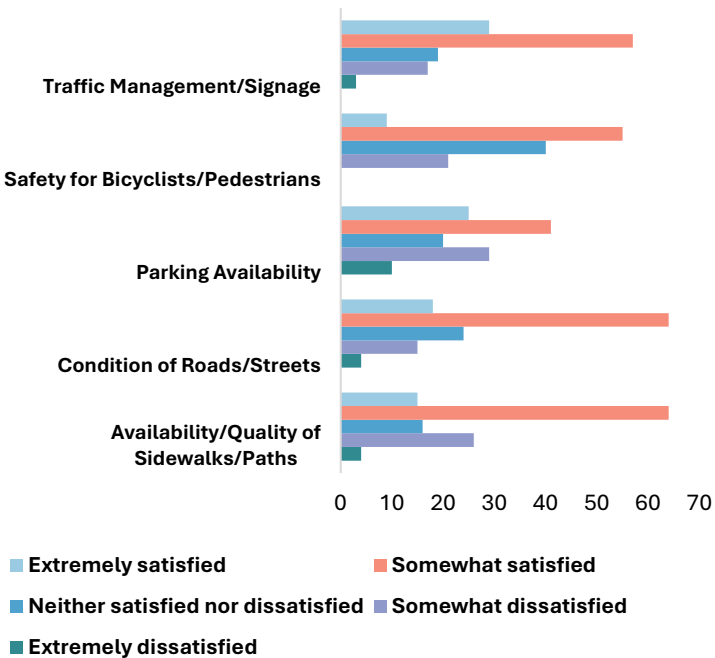


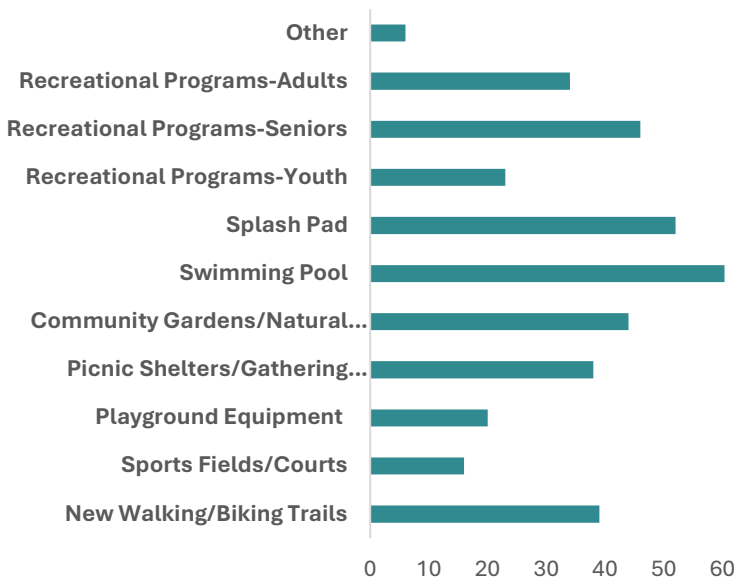


Photo Courtesy of Main Street West Branch

Parks, Recreation, and Quality of Life

Residents expressed strong interest in maintaining and expanding parks and recreation opportunities (Figure 1.16). Top priorities include trails and walking/biking infrastructure, community gathering spaces, and recreational programming for all age groups. These responses highlight the importance of parks and recreation as a key component of quality of life in West Branch.

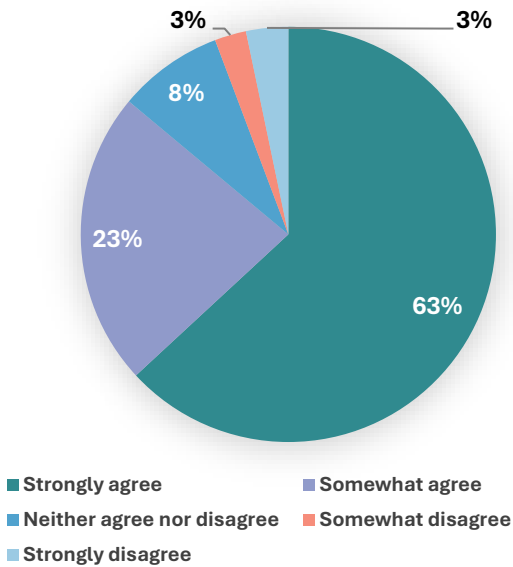
Figure 1.16 Preferred Parks and Recreation Improvements



Historic Identity and Community Values

Survey results indicate strong support for preserving West Branch’s historic character and identity (Figure 1.17), particularly its connection to the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, where 86% of respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree history of the area is important. Residents consistently identified history and small-town character as defining features of the community, reinforcing the importance of preservation in future planning efforts.

Figure 1.17 Importance of Historical Identity and Assets



Conclusion

The analysis of demographics, planning efforts, and public input shows that West Branch is a growing community rooted in small town values and historic character. Many residents are attracted to the small town living and close proximity to work and entertainments opportunities in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and the Quad Cities.

Growth management also presents significant challenges related to infrastructure capacity, public finance, and maintaining the community character valued by residents. Community leaders and residents must navigate the complexity of maintaining quality public services even as state legislation limits revenue growth for cities.

Through a combination of in-person events, a community-wide survey, stakeholder input, and continued outreach, residents were given multiple opportunities to shape the direction of the plan. Feedback gathered throughout this process highlights strong satisfaction with West Branch’s quality of life alongside important concerns related to housing affordability,

infrastructure capacity, and the pace and form of future growth.

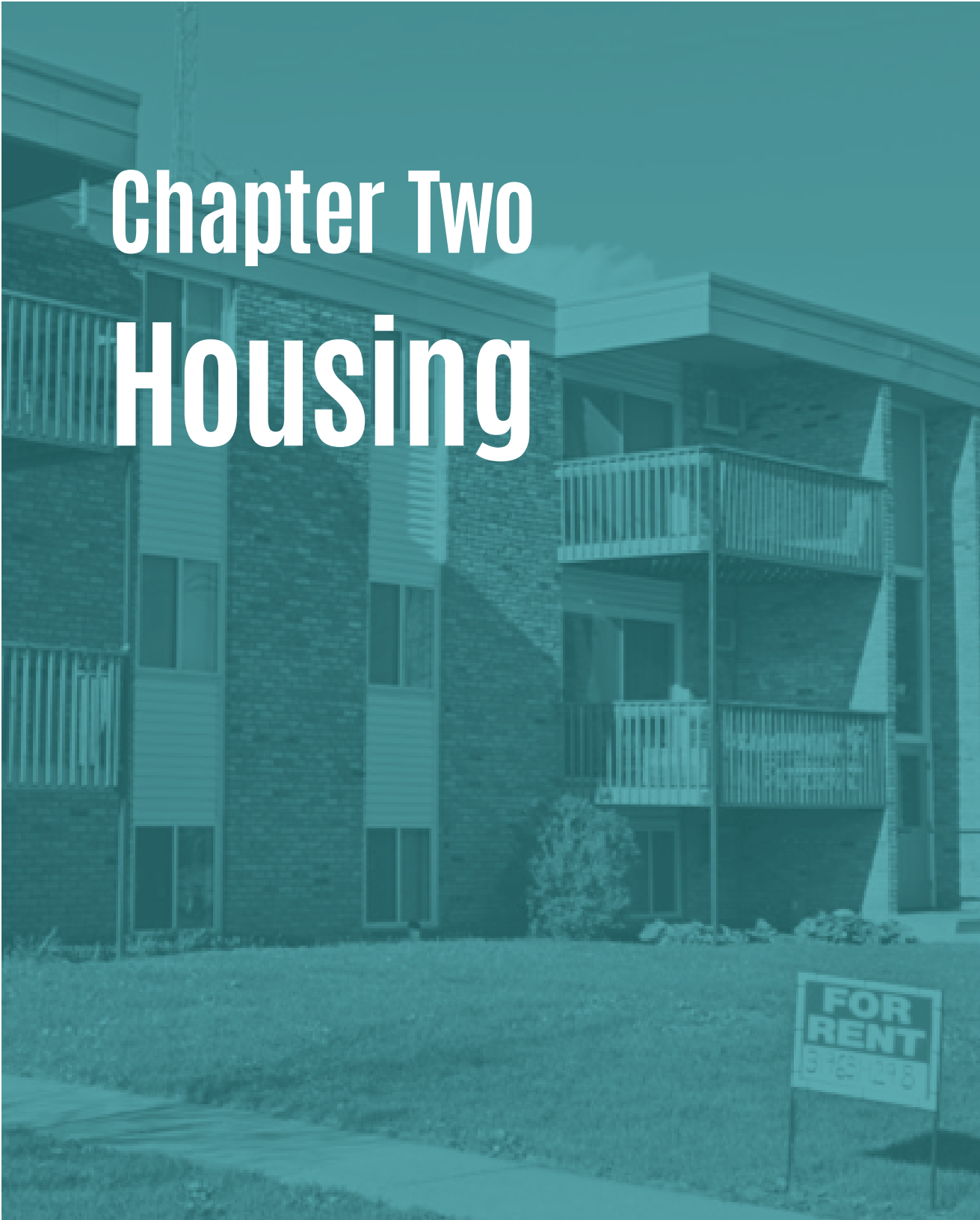
Residents expressed broad support for maintaining the community’s small-town character while accommodating thoughtful and well-managed development. The emphasis on infrastructure investment, housing diversity, transportation improvements, and preservation of community identity reflects a desire for balanced growth that aligns with existing conditions and long-term sustainability.

A basic SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) highlights some of the key factors driving growth and change in the community. This analysis reflects findings from research, interviews, and observations. which are explored in more depth throughout the plan.

- **Strengths:** strong sense of community, public school district, Main Street West Branch, housing diversity, historic character, and overall high quality of life.

- **Weaknesses:** low infrastructure capacity to accommodate new growth, low land availability, flood risk, lack of affordable housing affordability, limited economic opportunities within the city.
- **Opportunities:** leveraging historic assets and proximity to Iowa City, infill development, strong interest from developers, access to state and federal funding sources, regional partnerships.
- **Threats:** unmanaged growth pressures, potential impacts from natural or man-made hazards, state legislation limiting public revenue.

The findings from this engagement process, as summarized throughout this chapter, directly informed the development of goals, policies, and strategies presented in subsequent chapters. Together, these efforts ensure that the comprehensive plan reflects both community input and a shared vision for West Branch’s future.



Chapter Two Housing

Housing Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

West Branch provides safe, attainable, and diverse housing opportunities that meet the needs of residents across different income levels, household types, and stages of life. Housing developments strengthen neighborhood character, support long-term community sustainability, and maintain the small-town identity that residents value.

The City of West Branch encourages a balanced mix of housing types while promoting quality development, reinvestment in existing neighborhoods, and coordinated growth aligned with infrastructure and public services. Housing policies and development decisions support economic opportunity, community stability, and an improved quality of life for current and future residents.

Goals

1. Provide safe and affordable housing options to meet the needs of residents at all phases of life.
2. Support preservation of older housing stock, energy efficiency, and safe conditions for all housing.
3. Ensure growth and development aligns with infrastructure capacity, fiscal responsibility, and community character.

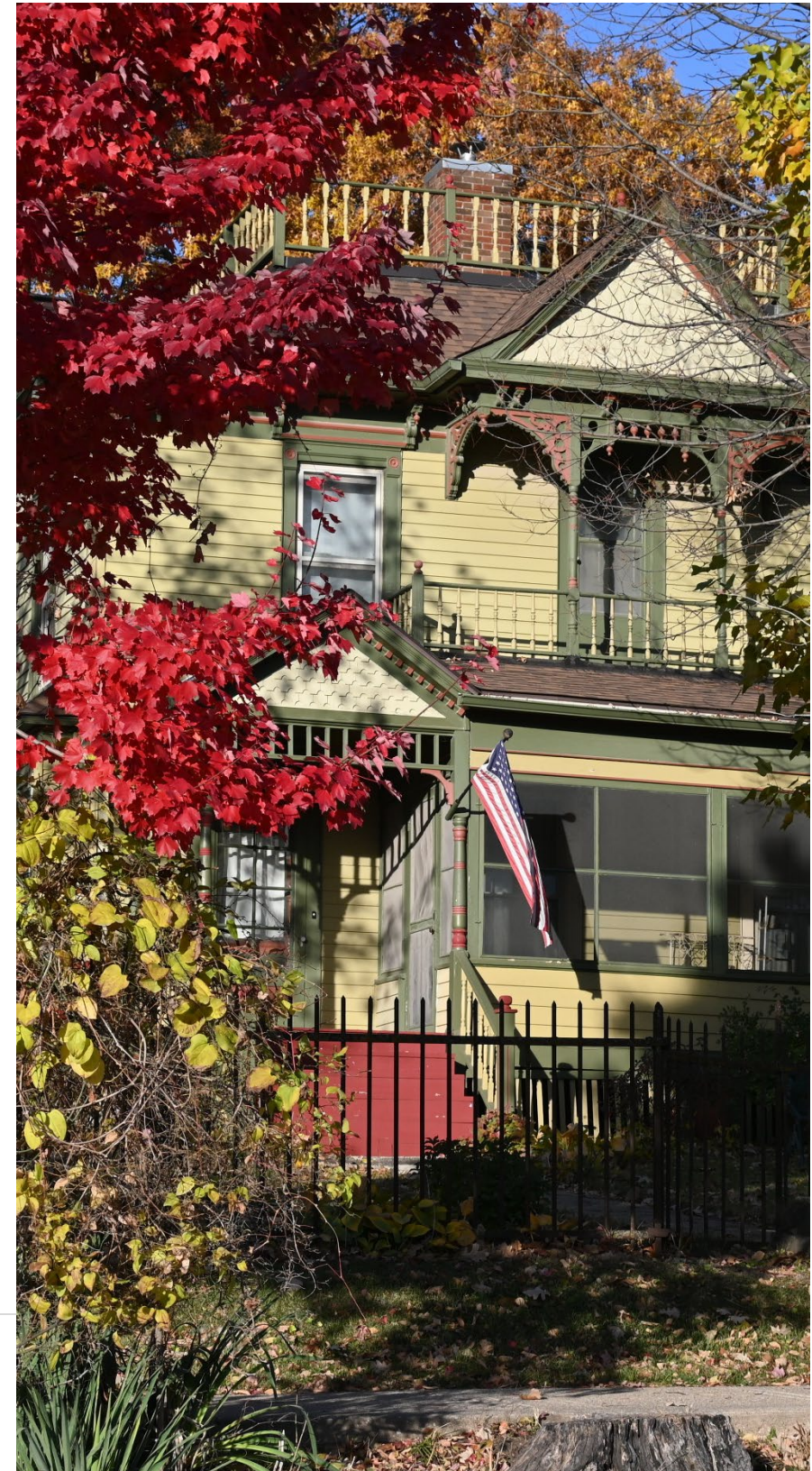
Introduction

Housing is a fundamental component of community development and quality of life. Safe, attainable, and well-maintained housing supports public health, economic stability, and long-term community sustainability. The availability, condition, and diversity of housing also influence population trends, workforce attraction, neighborhood character, and overall livability.

West Branch's housing stock has historically been mostly single-family detached homes, reflecting the community's small-town character and long-standing pattern of low-density residential development. In recent years, however, the city has experienced increasing development pressure associated with regional growth in the Iowa City metropolitan area, as well as increasing housing costs that make ownership unattainable for many people. New housing construction, changing demographic trends, and increasing costs have created both challenges and opportunities related to affordability, housing diversity, infrastructure, and neighborhood preservation.

This chapter evaluates existing housing conditions in West Branch, including housing typology, tenure, age, affordability, and development trends. It also examines the relationship between housing and broader community goals related to economic development, infrastructure, public health, and growth management. While West Branch maintains a strong culture of homeownership, there is growing recognition of the need for a wider range of housing options that can support residents across different income levels, household sizes, and stages of life.

The character of West Branch's neighborhoods, historic housing, and residential areas contribute significantly to the identity of the community. As future development occurs, the city will need to balance housing growth with the preservation of community character, infrastructure capacity, and long-term fiscal sustainability. This chapter establishes a framework to guide future housing decisions and support coordinated, sustainable residential development in West Branch.



Existing Conditions – Housing

Housing Typology

West Branch’s housing stock is primarily composed of detached single-family homes, reflecting the community’s historic pattern of low-density residential development and small-town character. Owner-occupied single-family homes continue to represent the dominant housing type throughout the city and are common within both established neighborhoods and newer residential developments. Figure 2.1 illustrates a recently constructed single-family home within the Pheasant Run development, representing the continued demand for newer detached housing in West Branch.

Figure 2.1. A House at the Pheasant Run Development



Figure 2.2: West Branch Housing by Typology, 2024

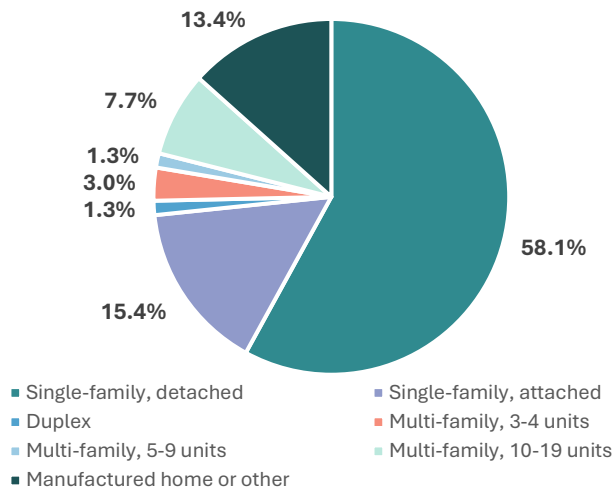


Figure 2.2 shows the breakdown of housing in West Branch by typology using ACS 2024 estimates. Detached single-family structures (58.1%) are significantly larger in proportion compared to all other housing types. However, this is lower than the state proportion of 73.5%. Detached single-family homes, also called zero-lot homes, and duplexes make up 16.7% in West Branch compared to 6.7% in the state. Notably, the proportion of manufactured homes (previously referred to as mobile homes) is also relatively high at 13.4% for West Branch, whereas they make up 3.0% of homes in the state. It is important to note that ACS estimates have not yet

captured new residential construction, so the proportion of multi-family types has increased in recent years. Figure 2.3 shows an example of multi-family housing on Orange Street in the northern area of West Branch.

Figure 2.3 Apartments for Rent in West Branch



The recent residential growth in West Branch has further expanded the diversity of the local housing stock. While planned developments and subdivisions continue to produce many new detached single-family homes, attached zero-lot housing and multi-unit residential development in select areas have also been more common. In addition to single-family homes, apartments and multi-family structures provide rental

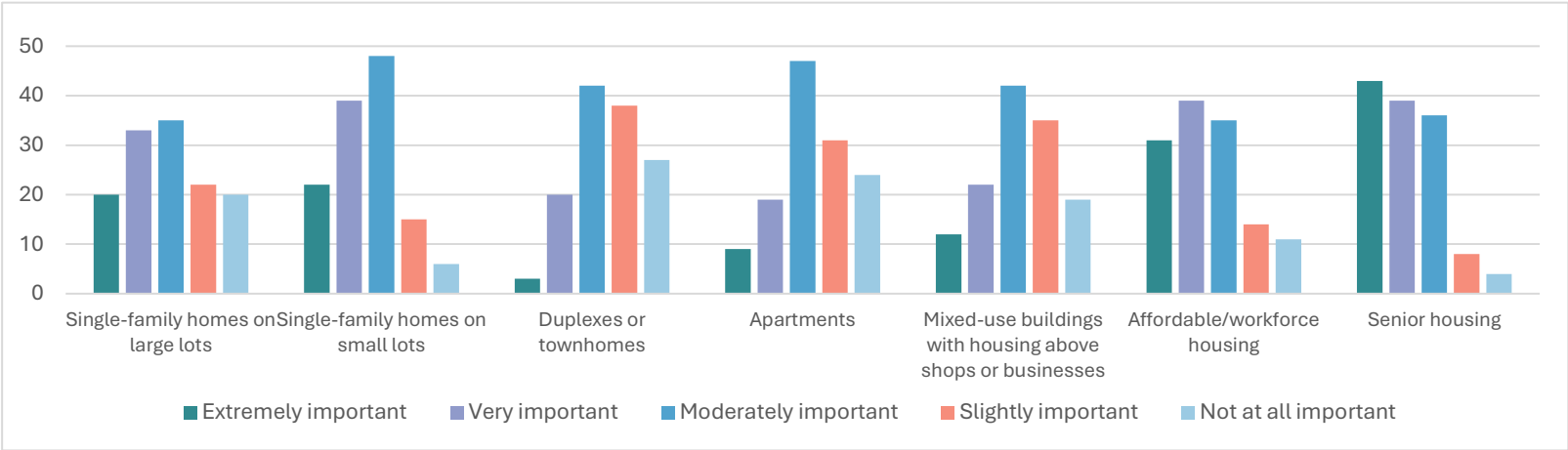
opportunities for residents. While multi-unit housing remains a relatively smaller share of the overall housing stock, it provides options for residents including young adults, seniors, and low- to moderate-income households.

Manufactured housing also plays a significant role within the community’s housing supply. Manufactured homes provide one of the more attainable affordable housing options within West Branch and contribute to overall housing diversity. West Branch contains a higher proportion of manufactured housing than many comparable peer communities. Figure 2.4 shows an example of manufactured housing located within West Branch Village.

Figure 2.4 Manufactured Home in West Branch Village



Figure 2.5 Survey results on importance of future development of housing of various types



Community-wide survey results help convey public sentiments about the importance of various housing types in future residential developments (Figure 2.5). Notably, residents largely view affordable/workforce housing and senior housing as extremely or very important. However, multifamily development typologies were generally viewed as less important, indicating a preference for affordable single-family options for workers, low-to-moderate income residents, and seniors. This presents a challenge, however, as construction costs for single-family homes can be cost prohibitive to residents with lower incomes.

The design of new housing and neighborhoods plays a significant role in public sentiments about housing growth and may point toward strategies that meet the needs of less affluent and older residents while preserving community character.

During the open house, attendees were asked to evaluate residential design styles through a visual preference exercise (Figure 2.6). They placed green stickers on housing styles they supported and red stickers on styles they viewed less favorably. While only a small number of residents participated, the results suggest that multi-family development may receive stronger support if the design appeals to the broader community.

Figure 2.6 Housing Typology Preferences



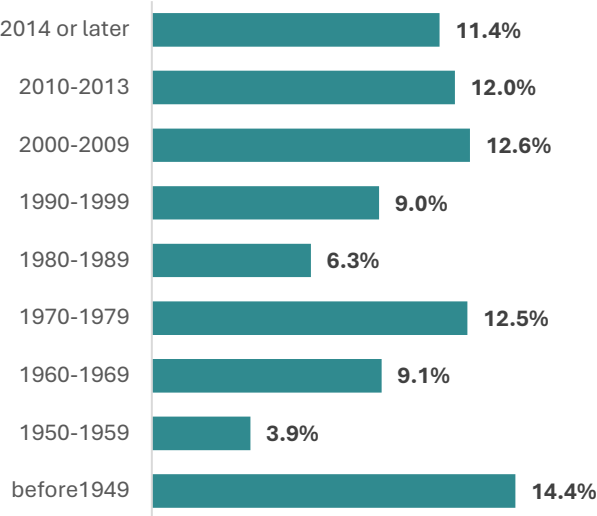
Housing Age and Conditions

West Branch contains a mix of older housing stock and newer residential development. More than half of the city’s housing units were constructed before 2000, with a substantial portion of homes built prior to 1949. At the same time, the community experienced notable residential growth during the early 2000s and has continued to add newer housing units in recent years.

The age of the housing stock has important implications for maintenance, rehabilitation, infrastructure, and long-term housing quality. Older homes often contribute to the historic character and identity of West Branch but may also require reinvestment and modernization over time. Aging housing can present challenges related to energy efficiency, accessibility, deferred maintenance, and environmental health concerns.

Figure 2.7 illustrates the distribution of housing units by the year they were built and demonstrates both the presence of historic housing and the more recent periods of residential expansion within the community.

Figure 2.7 Distribution of Housing Units by Year Built



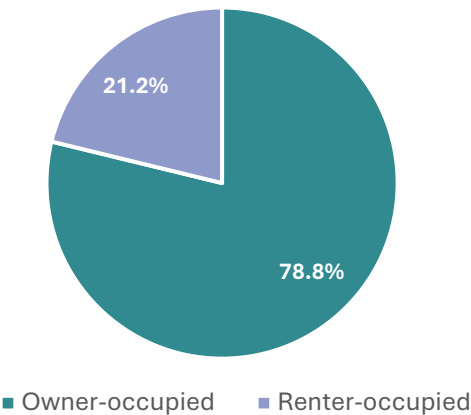
Older housing stock may also increase the likelihood of lead-based paint exposure and aging utility infrastructure. Because lead-based residential paint was banned in 1978, homes constructed prior to that period may require additional monitoring, rehabilitation, or mitigation efforts to reduce potential health risks.

Continued housing reinvestment and rehabilitation efforts can help preserve neighborhood quality while improving long-term housing safety and livability.

Housing tenure

West Branch demonstrates a strong culture of homeownership, with owner-occupied housing (78.8%) units significantly outnumbering renter-occupied units (21.2%), as shown in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8 Share of Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Households in West Branch, 2024



The predominance of owner-occupied housing reflects the traditional residential development pattern of West Branch and contributes to neighborhood stability and long-term community investment. However, limited rental availability may also constrain housing options for young residents and seniors, smaller households,

seasonal workers, and individuals seeking more attainable or flexible housing opportunities. More recently, additional apartment developments and higher-density residential projects have begun to diversify local housing tenure options. Figure 2.9 shows newer housing development near the freeway corridor, representing recent residential growth and expanded housing opportunities within the community.

Figure 2.9 New Housing in Parkside Hills Close to the I-80



Housing Values

Housing values within West Branch are generally lower relative to the broader regional housing market. Most owner-occupied homes fall between \$150,000 and \$299,999, which is consistent with many comparable communities throughout Iowa.

West Branch continues to maintain a relative affordability advantage compared to some nearby higher-growth communities within the Iowa City metropolitan region. At the same time, increasing housing prices and newer residential construction have contributed to rising housing costs in recent years.

Table 2.1 summarizes assessed owner-occupied housing values for West Branch and the State of Iowa by price range. Just over one quarter (26.3%) of West Branch owner-occupied homes are valued between \$200,000 and \$300,000. About 45% are valued below \$200,000. West Branch has a much higher proportion of owner-occupied homes valued below \$50,000 (13.2%) compared to the state (6.6%).

The availability of moderately priced housing may help attract households seeking more attainable

homeownership opportunities within commuting distance of larger employment centers. However, continued increases in housing prices may create additional affordability pressures for lower-income households, younger residents, and first-time homebuyers.

Table 2.1. Owner-Occupied Home Values in West Branch and State of Iowa, 2024.

	West Branch	State of Iowa
Less than \$20,000	2.7%	2.6%
\$20,000 to \$49,999	10.5%	4.0%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	3.7%	11.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	15.2%	13.8%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	13.0%	16.2%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	26.3%	23.1%
\$300,000 to \$399,999	17.0%	13.9%
\$400,000 to \$499,999	4.2%	7.3%
\$500,000 to \$749,999	7.4%	5.4%
\$750,000 to \$999,999	0.0%	1.4%
\$1,000,000 or More	0.0%	1.1%

Housing Cost Burden

Housing cost burden remains an important issue for many households within West Branch, particularly renters. A household is generally considered cost burdened when more than 30 percent of household income is spent on housing costs, including rent, mortgage payments, and utilities.

Figure 2.10 Comparison of House Cost-Burden Renter Households

	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied	All Households
Total	855	182	1,037
# Cost-burdened	216	79	295
% Cost-burdened	25%	43%	28%

Figure 2.10 shows that renter households in West Branch experience housing cost burden at a higher rate (43%) than owner occupied households (25%).

This indicates that many renters may face challenges related to housing affordability and long-term financial stability. Comparatively, 17%

of owner-occupied households and 35% of renter-occupied households across the state are cost-burdened.

The combination of limited rental supply, rising housing costs, and regional development pressures may continue to increase affordability concerns over time. Expanding attainable housing options and encouraging a broader range of housing types may help reduce housing cost burdens and improve overall housing accessibility within the community.

Housing Trends and Practices

Housing strategies often focus on providing diverse, attainable, and sustainable housing opportunities while preserving neighborhood character and supporting long-term community stability. As West Branch continues to grow, future housing decisions should balance affordability, infrastructure capacity, community identity, and quality design. The following practices highlight planning approaches that can help support a wider range of housing needs while maintaining the small-town character valued by residents.

Housing Diversity

Communities throughout Iowa and the Midwest have increasingly encouraged a wider range of housing types to improve affordability, support workforce housing, and accommodate changing household sizes. Communities such as Ottumwa and Waukon have incorporated housing diversity strategies into recent housing planning efforts, including smaller-scale housing, townhomes, apartments, and mixed residential development. Accessory-dwelling units (ADUs) have gained

more attention in recent years, particularly following recent state enabling legislation granting property owners the right to build them. Expanding housing options can help communities support residents across different income levels and stages of life while reducing pressure on single-family housing supply.

Neighborhood Character and Design

Many communities have adopted residential design standards and neighborhood planning approaches intended to preserve community identity while accommodating growth. Best practices often emphasize walkability, architectural variation, green space, and neighborhood connectivity while discouraging repetitive subdivision design patterns. Communities have also increasingly encouraged housing that complements historic downtowns and established neighborhoods through compatible scale and streetscape design.

Housing Rehabilitation and Aging in Place

Many communities have adopted housing rehabilitation and aging-in-place strategies to support long-term neighborhood stability and allow residents to remain safely in their homes as they age. Best practices often include housing maintenance programs, accessibility improvements, energy-efficiency upgrades, and the development of smaller and lower-maintenance housing options for older adults and smaller households.

Coordinated and Sustainable Growth

Communities throughout Iowa and the Midwest have increasingly emphasized coordinated and sustainable residential growth practices that align housing development with infrastructure capacity, transportation systems, utilities, and public services. Best practices encourage development patterns that support efficient service delivery, preserve community character, and reduce long-term fiscal and infrastructure challenges associated with unmanaged growth.

Conclusion

West Branch’s housing reflects both the community’s historic small-town identity and its ongoing connection to the larger Iowa City metropolitan region. While single-family detached homes continue to define much of the community’s residential character, changing demographic trends, rising housing costs, and increasing development pressure highlight the growing importance of housing diversity, affordability, rehabilitation, and coordinated growth planning.

West Branch has experienced increasing residential development activity in recent years due in part to regional population growth and the community’s proximity to surrounding employment centers. New subdivisions, attached housing developments, and apartment projects have increased housing options beyond traditional single-family homes.

Housing will continue to play a central role in shaping the future growth, character, and long-term sustainability of West Branch. As the community continues to experience residential development pressures associated with regional

growth trends, housing decisions will influence neighborhood character, infrastructure demands, economic opportunity, and overall quality of life for current and future residents.

The findings presented throughout this chapter demonstrate the importance of balancing future housing growth with infrastructure capacity, fiscal sustainability, neighborhood preservation, and community livability.

Future housing planning efforts should continue to support a variety of housing options, encourage reinvestment in existing neighborhoods, and promote development patterns that strengthen community connectivity and long-term sustainability. Coordinated planning between housing, transportation, utilities, economic development, and public services will remain important as West Branch continues to grow and adapt to changing needs.



Go more in depth with the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A.



Radon Testing



Design Guidelines & Energy Efficiency



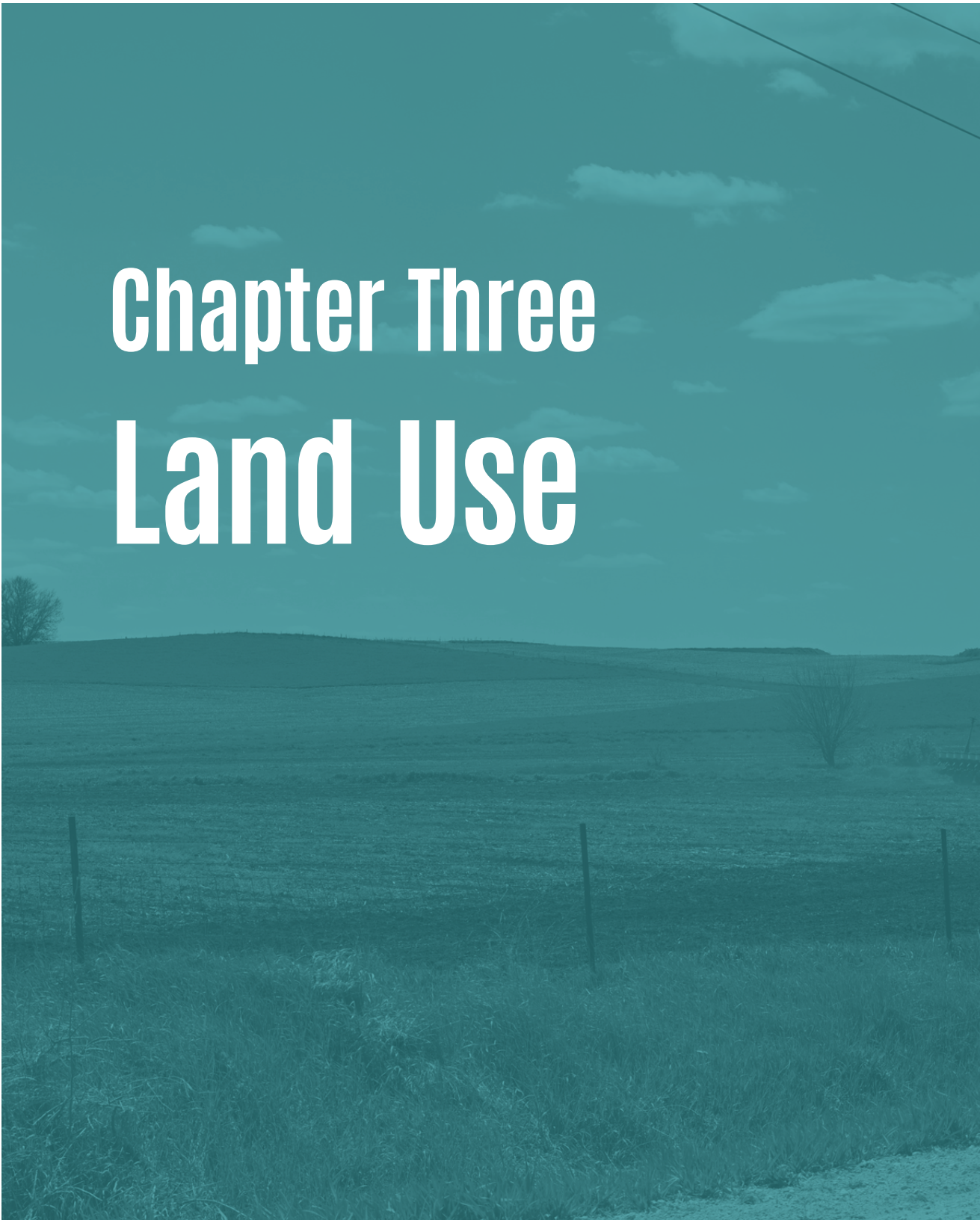
Managing Greenfield Development

Housing | Page 33

Goal H1 Provide safe and affordable housing options to meet the needs of residents at all phases of life.	Objective H1.1 Promote a diverse mix of housing types that accommodates residents throughout all stages of life. • Strategy H1.1a Encourage a variety of housing types, including single-family homes, duplexes, townhomes, cottage homes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), multiplexes, apartments, and mixed-use residential developments. • Strategy H1.1b Increase opportunities for "missing middle" housing that bridges the gap between single-family homes and larger apartment complexes, with options that support young professionals, families, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and multigenerational households. • Strategy H1.1c Promote and support age-friendly housing and universal design construction that enables residents to “age in place” within the community.
	Objective H1.2 Expand the supply of affordable housing and reduce housing cost burden and risk of displacement for vulnerable residents. • Strategy H1.2a Support public-private partnerships that leverage federal, state, regional, and local resources for affordable housing development. • Strategy H1.2b Identify and remove unnecessary regulatory requirements that increase housing costs. • Strategy H1.2c Promote and support programs that increase affordable rental housing and reduce housing cost-burden, including coordination with housing service providers based in Johnson County. • Strategy H1.2d Strengthen targeted engagement and partnerships to ensure housing stability and prevent displacement for vulnerable residents, including households in West Branch village.
	Objective H1.3 Modernize land use regulations to support affordable and innovative housing. • Strategy H1.3a Review and update zoning and subdivision regulations to remove barriers to housing diversity and affordability, including an evaluation of minimum lot sizes, zoning density, and minimum parking requirements for multi-family structures. • Strategy H1.3b Streamline permitting and approval processes for affordable and workforce housing developments.

Goal H2 Support preservation of older housing stock, energy efficiency, and safe conditions for all housing.	Objective H2.1 Encourage rehabilitation and preservation of existing homes to extend their useful life. • Strategy H2.1a Identify opportunities to assist neighborhood groups and homeowners in addressing deferred maintenance before conditions worsen. • Strategy H2.1b Promote programs and resources that help eligible homeowners with rehabilitation and improvements, such as ECIA’s Health Homes Program and Older Adult Home Modification Program, to help
	Objective H2.2 Improve energy efficiency, affordability, and resilience of the community's housing stock while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and household utility costs. • Strategy H2.2a Promote participation in energy audit, weatherization, and housing rehabilitation programs, by, for example, promoting MidAmerican Energy’s programs and participating in Green Iowa AmeriCorps. • Strategy H2.2b Provide information on resources and incentives for retrofitting old homes, insulation, HVAC upgrades, energy-efficient appliances, and solar installations. • Strategy H2.2c Encourage energy-efficient building practices in new construction.
	Objective H2.2 Mitigate environmental health risks in new and existing housing. • Strategy H2.3a Coordinate with local and regional public health agencies, such as Cedar County Public Health, to distribute radon test kits and provide public education regarding radon risks. • Strategy H2.3b Encourage installation of radon mitigation systems and promote radon-resistant construction in new housing; include periodic radon assessment and compliance in rental permitting and inspections. • Strategy H2.3c Support identification and phased replacement of lead service lines in coordination with utility providers. • Strategy H2.3d Mitigate exposure to lead-based paint hazards in homes built before 1978, including promotion of ECIA's Lead Paint and Healthy Homes program to eligible households.

Goal H3 Ensure growth and development aligns with infrastructure capacity, fiscal responsibility, and community character.	Objective H3.1 Coordinate housing growth with infrastructure capacity, service capacity, and fiscal sustainability • Strategy H3.1a For new subdivisions, evaluate up-front and long-term maintenance costs of public infrastructure investments relative to property tax revenue and other community benefits. • Strategy H3.1b Ensure responsible use of Tax Increment Financing and other development incentives. • Strategy H3.1c Monitor impacts of new development on existing infrastructure, household fees and taxes, and public services.
	Objective H3.2 Maintain and cultivate strong, stable neighborhoods. • Strategy H3.2a Strengthen and establish design standards to ensure infill development and subdivisions align with exiting neighborhood and community character. • Strategy H3.2b Enforce policies and design standards within the historic preservation district. • Strategy H3.2c Encourage housing development that meets community goals for walkability, connectivity, livability, and access to essential services and amenities.



Chapter Three

Land Use

Land Use Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

West Branch enjoys a well-planned aesthetically pleasing cityscape with convenient access to basic infrastructure and with optimum land utilization that supports economic vitality, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and public safety.

Goals

1. Create an attractive, efficient, and coherent built environment that reinforces historic identity and long-term community stability.
2. Improve the market value and use value of underutilized commercial properties and public land.
3. Improve public safety through safe land use and hazard-resilient development.

Introduction

Just on the outskirts of the Iowa City metro, one of the fastest growing areas in the state, West Branch has increasingly become a desirable community for many families and businesses. The unique community character, rich history, quality school system, and strong social fabric draw in new residents each year. In fact, West Branch has experienced accelerated growth rate in the last five years.

Rapid growth does not come without challenges. Aging infrastructure, limited land availability, and skepticism about growth among some residents are obstacles for those who hope to see the community grow and evolve.

While some external factors are outside of the community's control, West Branch residents can make collective decisions about how they want the community to look and feel in the future. West Branch could welcome new developments that expand the city's borders, or they can limit growth through land use regulations. Both paths come with costs and benefits that require careful consideration.

This chapter presents an analysis of land use patterns and spatial development opportunities for residents and decision-makers. As defined by the Iowa Land Use Planning Notebook, a land use plan is a spatial development framework that identifies the existing and proposed location, extent, and intensity of land uses, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, educational, and other public and private uses.

The existing land use analysis reflects the extent and intensity of development at the time of the study, providing a foundation for evaluating current conditions and identifying future land needs. By incorporating community input, current infrastructure capacity, and best practices, the future land use plan assesses how land can be used to meet future needs and establishes strategies to guide development in a manner that is efficient, coordinated, and consistent with community goals.

A major component of a comprehensive plan is the Future Land Use Plan, which seeks to determine and illustrate the optimal use of

physical land assets to meet the needs of the community. While not a binding regulatory guideline, the Future Land Use Map is generally utilized by the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council to evaluate rezoning applications for private property. At the same time, the map provides clarity to property owners and developers about how use of their land aligns with a broader vision for the community.

As a visual representation of land use categories for each parcel within city boundaries, the Future Land Use Map aims to optimize land resources to meet community needs while also protecting property rights and property values. The map also illustrates how West Branch may expand through the process of annexation as the community experiences anticipated population growth.

Existing Conditions – Land Use

Current land use in West Branch reflects its unique characteristics as a historic community and its proximity to the Iowa City metropolitan area. The total land area is about 3.2 square miles, or just over 2,000 acres. The boundaries have changed over time, primarily in response to new residential subdivisions. Over the next 25 years, more growth and development is expected due to the increasing population across the region.

Table 3.1 shows the proportion of land use in West Branch by major categories. Residential areas make up the largest proportion at 29%, followed by agricultural (24%), industrial (20%), institutional (14%), commercial (11%), and city parks and open space (2%).

The proportion of institutional land is remarkably high due to the presence of the federally-owned Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. Land use at this site is not regulated by the City of West Branch and does not contribute to the City’s tax base.

Figure 3.1 shows West Branch’s current land use map. Interstate 80 is a major dividing line

between the northern and southern portions of the city. Most undeveloped agricultural land is located along the city's western border, particularly west of the industrial park south of I-80, where land remains available for development. A commercial node south of I-80 is geared primarily toward Interstate 80 travelers. The other major commercial hub in West Branch is the downtown district, home to small retail shops, civic buildings, museums, restaurants, and more.

Table 3.1 Proportions of Various Land Use Types		
Land Use Type	Total Acres	%
Residential	439	29%
Agricultural	356	24%
Industrial	294	20%
Institutional	213	14%
Commercial	160	11%
Parks & Open Space	29	2%

Floodplain Impact

Another major factor impacting future land use decisions is the floodplain. Wapsinonoc Creek winds through the community and has overflowed its banks many times, inundating homes and business throughout West Branch. Figure 3.2 shows the extent of the flooding that could occur in the 100- and 500-hundred year flooding events.

A series of 11 floods in the 2000s and early 2010s and a couple of major floods through downtown in the summer of 2014 emphasized the importance of flood mitigation. Flooding threatens to disrupt transportation, economic activity, and even emergency services, since the fire and police department are located within the floodway.

In 2026, West Branch completed a creek widening project with the goal that the creek will hold more stormwater and significantly reduce the risk of flooding. Floodplain regulations will continue to limit new construction activity in the floodplain to reduce risk to health and property.

Figure 3.1 Current Land Use Map

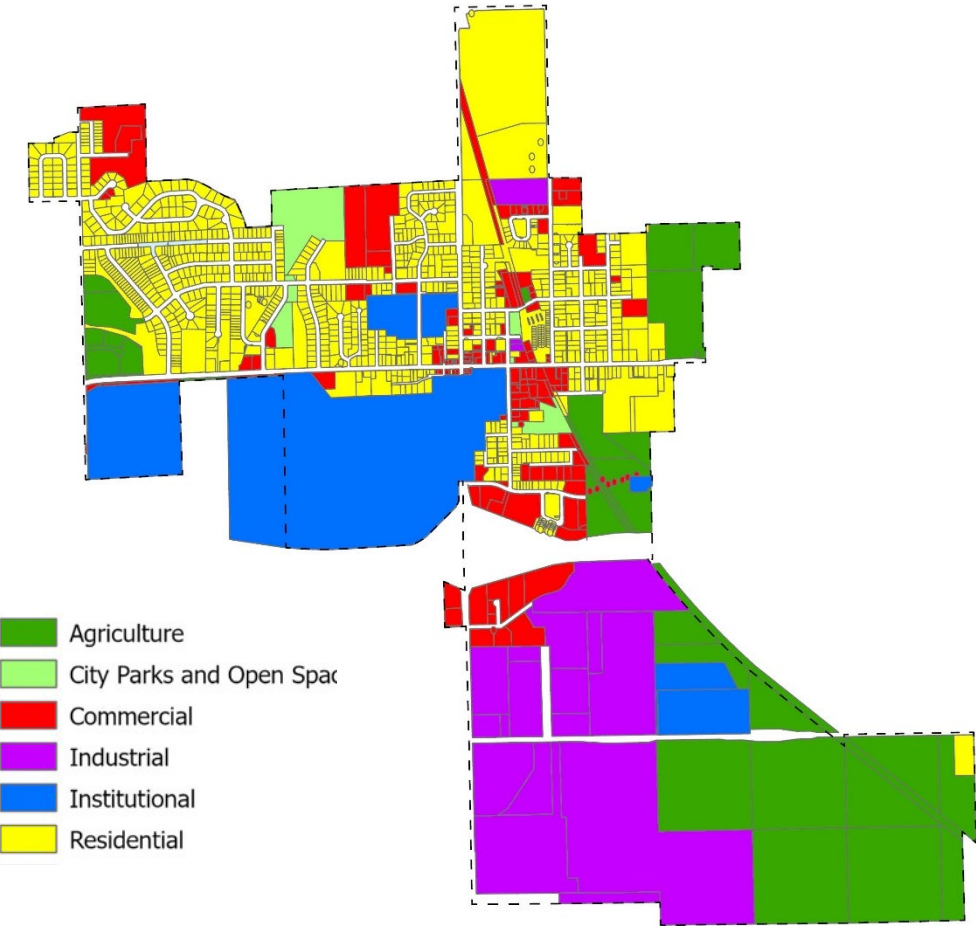
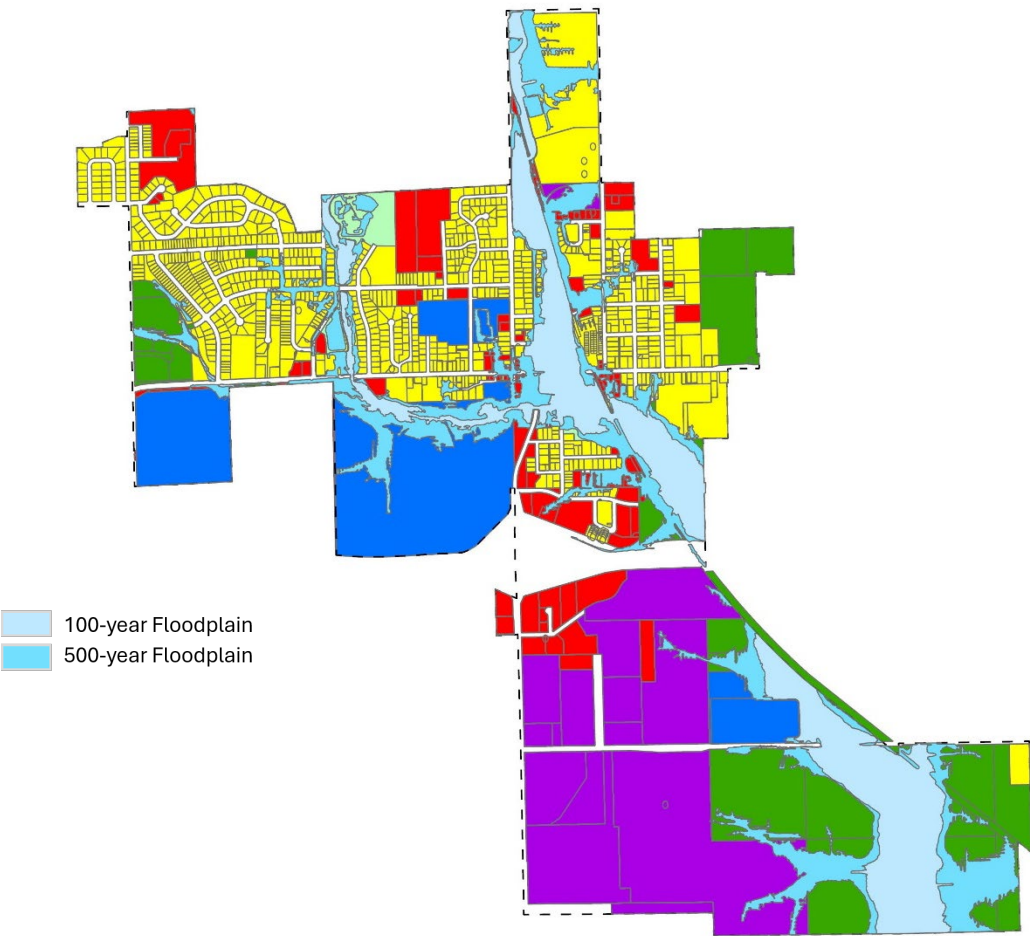


Figure 3.2 Current Land Use and Floodplain



Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources Floodplain Mapping
DRAFT DFIRM 1% & DFIRM 0.2% Flood Extent, Accessed July 2026

Population Growth Projection

Population projections help cities plan community needs for the future. Anticipating and guiding population changes over time can also inform land use and service capacity decisions. With population projections, the land area required to accommodate new residents can also be calculated.

The planning team considered various population growth scenarios through the year 2050. The first scenario considers West Branch’s historic population trends. Table 3.2 shows the population of West Branch going back to 1880 and the rate of annual growth during each decade.

Not surprisingly, population growth varies over time. West Branch has experienced its fastest rate of growth over the last 5 years. However, land and infrastructure constraints suggest the growth will taper off again and, because annual growth rates will continue to fluctuate, the average rate of growth over a longer period of time can reasonably be expected to continue. The planning team analyzed growth over several time periods to understand historic growth rates. Over the last

25 years, since 2000, West Branch has grown at an average rate of 2.23% per year. Going back even farther to 1970, West Branch grew at an annual rate of 2.26%. Based on this information, the scenario for continuing the historic trends uses an annual growth rate of 2.2%.

Table 3.2 West Branch populations and annualized growth rates

Year	Population	Annual Change
1880	501	N/A
1890	474	-0.54%
1900	647	3.65%
1910	643	-0.06%
1920	688	0.70%
1930	652	-0.52%
1940	719	1.03%
1950	769	0.70%
1960	1053	3.69%
1970	1322	2.55%
1980	1867	4.12%
1990	1908	0.22%
2000	2188	1.47%
2010	2322	0.61%
2020	2509	0.81%
2025	3267*	6.04%

*Estimation using 2020 Census and recent building permit data

2025 Population Estimate

To determine the estimated population for 2025, the planning team used the 2020 Census population (2,509) plus the estimated number of new residents occupying residential units constructed after the census through the end of calendar year 2025, based on building permit data provided by the City of West Branch. The number of units receiving building permits (263) multiplied by the average household size (2.43) equals 758 new residents and a resulting population of 3,267. Appendix B includes more details about the calculation.

Three more growth rates were considered to project a range for the possible number of residents in West Branch in 2050. First, the Cedar County annual growth rate of 0.03% represents a slow growth scenario. More likely, West Branch would more closely follow the growth rate for Johnson County at 1.58%. The final scenario considered is an accelerated growth rate modeled after Tiffin, also in Johnson County and currently one of the fastest growing cities in Iowa.

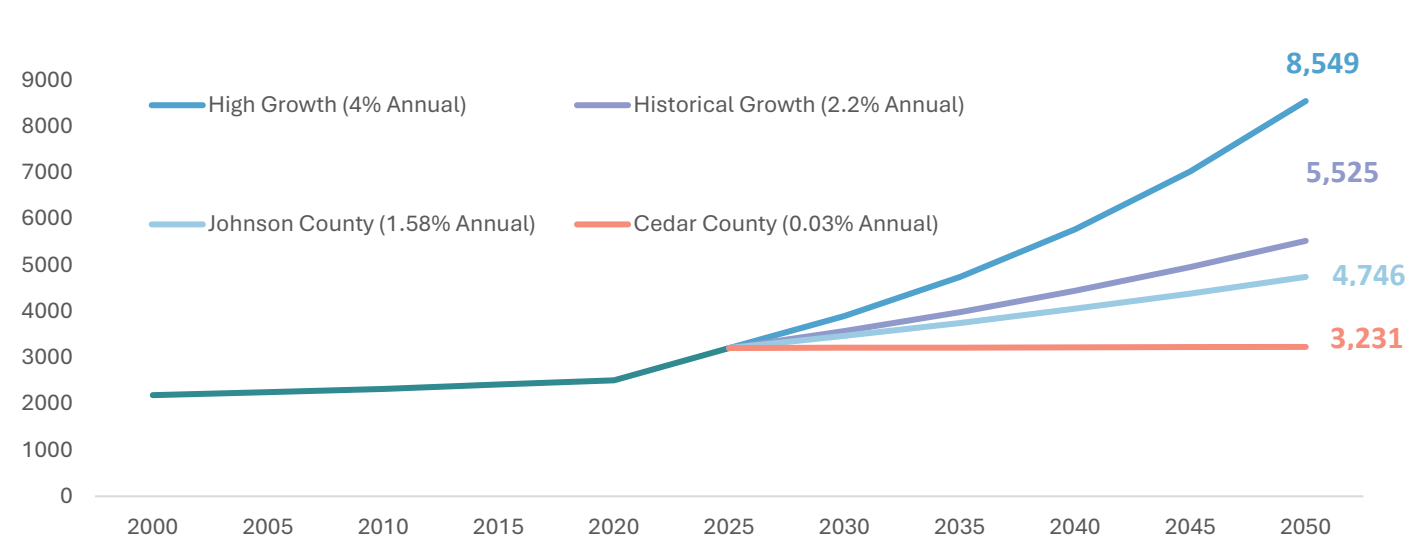
Growth at even half the level of Tiffin’s 8% rate is considered very high for any small city in Iowa, so this study considers a high annualized growth rate of 4.0%.

Figure 3.3 shows the 2050 project populations using the four growth rate scenarios, with a range of 3,231 total residents at the slow growth rate to 8,549 residents at the high growth rate.

To some degree, the West Branch community can determine the future growth of the city, since the nearby Iowa City metro will continue to drive population change. West Branch could help facilitate rapid growth through infrastructure investments and housing development incentives, or to limit growth through zoning regulations to preserve small-town qualities.

The historic growth rate of 2.2% suggests West Branch will have a population of 5,525 in 2050. In consultation with local officials, the planning team determined the historic growth rate would represent a managed growth model that aligns with infrastructure capacity and development opportunities and that rate was therefore used to anticipate future land area needs.

Figure 3.3 Population Growth Scenarios



Land Area Needs

The 2050 population estimate of 5,525 is an increase of 2,258 residents from the 2025 population. Assuming average household size remains consistent at 2.43 people per household, 929 housing units would be needed to accommodate the growth. For comparison, 273 residential building permits were issued from 2021 to 2025, and 55 more were issued in the first quarter of 2026 alone.

The land area required for new housing units depends on the types and density of housing. For example, multi-family apartment complexes require less land than large-lot single family housing.

West Branch’s current zoning ordinance provides minimum lot sizes for each residential zoning classification, which are:

- **R1 single-family:** 7,700 square feet (sq. ft.).
- **R2 two-family:** 8,400 sq. ft. (single family units minimum 6,000 sq. ft. in this zone).
- **R3 multi-family:** same minimum lot size as R2 for single and two-family units; 10,000 sq. ft. for 3-4 units; 2,000 sq. ft. per unit for 5-8 units; 1,800 sq. ft. for 9-12 units.

The minimum lot requirements can provide a mechanism for estimating the total units that fit onto an acre of land, with an assumption that about 30-35% of the land is needed for public infrastructure, such as roads, right-of-way, stormwater infrastructure, parks and open space, etc. The calculations suggest that on one acre of land, R1 “low-density detached” zoning would allow about 4 dwelling units; R2 “low-density attached” zoning would allow about 7 dwelling units, and R3 “multi-family medium/high density” would allow about 16 dwelling units. These results generally align with industry averages.

The land required to accommodate the projected 929 new households for the 2050 population estimate depends on housing mix. For example, if all new households were single-family detached units, 232 acres of land would be needed and if all

new homes were in 12-unit complexes, only 58 acres would be required.

The following three scenarios illustrate what the housing mix may look like in 2050 and the corresponding land area requirement (Table 3.3). Zoning regulations can impact the types and amounts of housing that would be allowed.

Scenario 1: Maintaining current mix

Figure 2.2 in the Housing chapter shows that the housing mix in West Branch is roughly 58% single family detached, 17% zero-lot or duplex, and 25% multi-family and manufactured homes (multi-family and manufactured homes are combined for the purposes of the land requirement analysis).

Maintaining this housing mix through 2050 would mean 539 new single-family housing units, 158 new duplex or zero-lot units, and 232 new multi-family units. The land required for this scenario would be approximately 172 acres.

Scenario 2: Medium/high density focus

Recent development trends in West Branch indicate a trend toward medium and high density development, potentially responding to current housing market demands. From 2020 to 2025,

West Branch issued 312 residential building permits, with 26% for single-family, 33% for zero-lot units and duplexes, and 41% for multi-family structures. Sustaining this trend would mean 242 new single-family housing units, 307 new duplex or zero-lot units, and 381 new multi-family units. The land required for this scenario would be approximately 128 acres.

Scenario 3 “Missing middle” focus

A third scenario to help understand future land needs focuses on “missing middle” housing. Missing middle refers to the shortage of medium-density housing facing many communities across the country- it falls between housing landscapes dominated predominantly by single-family and high-density areas. Another characteristic of missing middle housing is that the design is often intended to be compatible with single-family neighborhoods, which makes it an attractive option for infill development.

A missing middle housing development strategy could mean a mix of housing development with 30% low-density detached (279 units), 40% low-density attached (372 units), and 30% medium/high density (279 units). The land

required for this scenario would be approximately 140 acres.

Zoning reform

Many states and communities are reevaluating the land use patterns and regulations that have dominated residential development over the last century. As housing costs have risen and outpaced the growth in wages, home ownership has become more unattainable for many, and some struggle to manage housing rental costs. Housing advocates often point to the relatively inefficient use of land resulting from single-family zoning, which can lead to high infrastructure expenses, sprawl, vehicle-dependency, higher housing costs, and more. On the other hand, mixed-density and higher density development may better connect residents to amenities and daily needs, increase walkability, optimize public infrastructure investments, and boost social connectivity and cohesion.

The State of Iowa essentially eliminated single-family only zoning by passing Senate File 592 in 2025, which mandates that every single-family lot must allow at least one Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) by right.

Table 3.3 Housing and land area scenarios for 2050 population projection.

	% housing density type (low-detached, low-attached, medium-high)	# new units by housing density type	Total land area requirement
Scenario 1: Maintaining Current Housing Mix	58% 17% 25%	539 158 232	172 acres
Scenario 2: Medium/high density focus	26% 33% 41%	242 307 381	128 acres
Scenario 3: “Missing middle” focus	30% 40% 30%	279 372 279	140 acres

Communities may also better utilize limited land resources by reducing minimum lot requirements, allowing for smaller homes to be built. For comparison, the minimum lot requirement for Iowa City’s RS-5 zone (comparable to the R1 zone in West Branch) is 5,000 square feet, compared to 7,700 square feet in West Branch.

Minimum parking requirements for both residential and commercial areas provide another opportunity to reevaluate zoning and land use.

Some cities and across the country have removed minimum parking requirements to encourage the development of affordable housing or shift toward form-based design. The costs associated with parking requirements can cause affordable

housing development to become less attainable. Furthermore, the requirements may result in an oversupply of off-street parking, when scarce land resources can better serve the community. For housing in West Branch, the zoning code currently requires one off-street parking space per dwelling unit for single-family homes and duplexes, and two spaces per dwelling unit for multi-family developments. For commercial zones, parking requirements depend on the specific commercial activity, as outlined in Chapter 165.38 of the West Branch zoning code.

Zoning reform for West Branch requires further study but may yield positive changes that better utilize limited land resources and reduce housing costs, increase taxable land, and more.

Infill development

New development can occur through greenfield development, typically transitioning farm ground into subdivisions and other types of developments, or through infill development, which means building on vacant or underutilized land within city limits. Whereas greenfield development often requires expensive infrastructure investments (e.g. roads, water, sewer) and adds to future maintenance, infill development involves land already served by utility infrastructure.

A vacant land analysis and inventory provides a starting point for identifying infill development opportunities. The project team used assessor data, satellite imagery, and the Beacon property viewer for Cedar County to identify parcels that may have infill development potential. First, no value or very low values for buildings on the Cedar County Assessor data indicated properties that may be appropriate for some form of development. Next a visual scan of satellite imagery and the Beacon property viewer further indicated whether the parcel was potentially vacant or underutilized. Parcels within the 100-

year floodplain were then omitted from the list. The availability of public infrastructure and property ownership were not included in the analysis. The presence of vacant or underutilized land does not necessarily mean the property owner would be willing to develop it. Figure 3.4 shows a map of infill development potential.

Of all the identified parcels, most are vacant with no structures. A few have structures, with large land areas that could potentially be developed. About 86 of the identified acres, all north of Interstate 80, are zoned for residential or could become residential. Many vacant parcels are within existing residential subdivisions with planned residential development. The remaining land south of the interstate includes parcels in the commercial and industrial areas.

Overall, the analysis suggests that vacant property can accommodate some of the land requirement for the growth scenarios discussed in the previous section, as well as new industrial growth, but opportunities for new residential subdivisions are few or non-existent.

Figure 3.4 Infill Development Potential



Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan supports informed, sustainable land management and guides how the community can grow and change over time. A goal for the future land use mapping process is to utilize land for its highest and best use, so that the land aligns with community needs while also protecting individual property values.

Public engagement highlighted that West Branch residents valued the historic qualities and residential quality of the community and were less likely to imagine West Branch becoming a bigger commercial or industrial hub. Based on research findings and public input, the planning team developed three draft land use scenarios, which were shared during an online webinar. The webinar failed to yield sufficient community input, so the planning team also reached out to key stakeholders to review and discuss development scenarios. Scenario evaluation considered several criteria: environmental sustainability, economic viability, city aesthetics, social cohesion, convenience, and equity.

Key Land Management Best Practices

The planning team’s research into best practices guided overarching principles in the development of the West Branch Future Land Use Map:

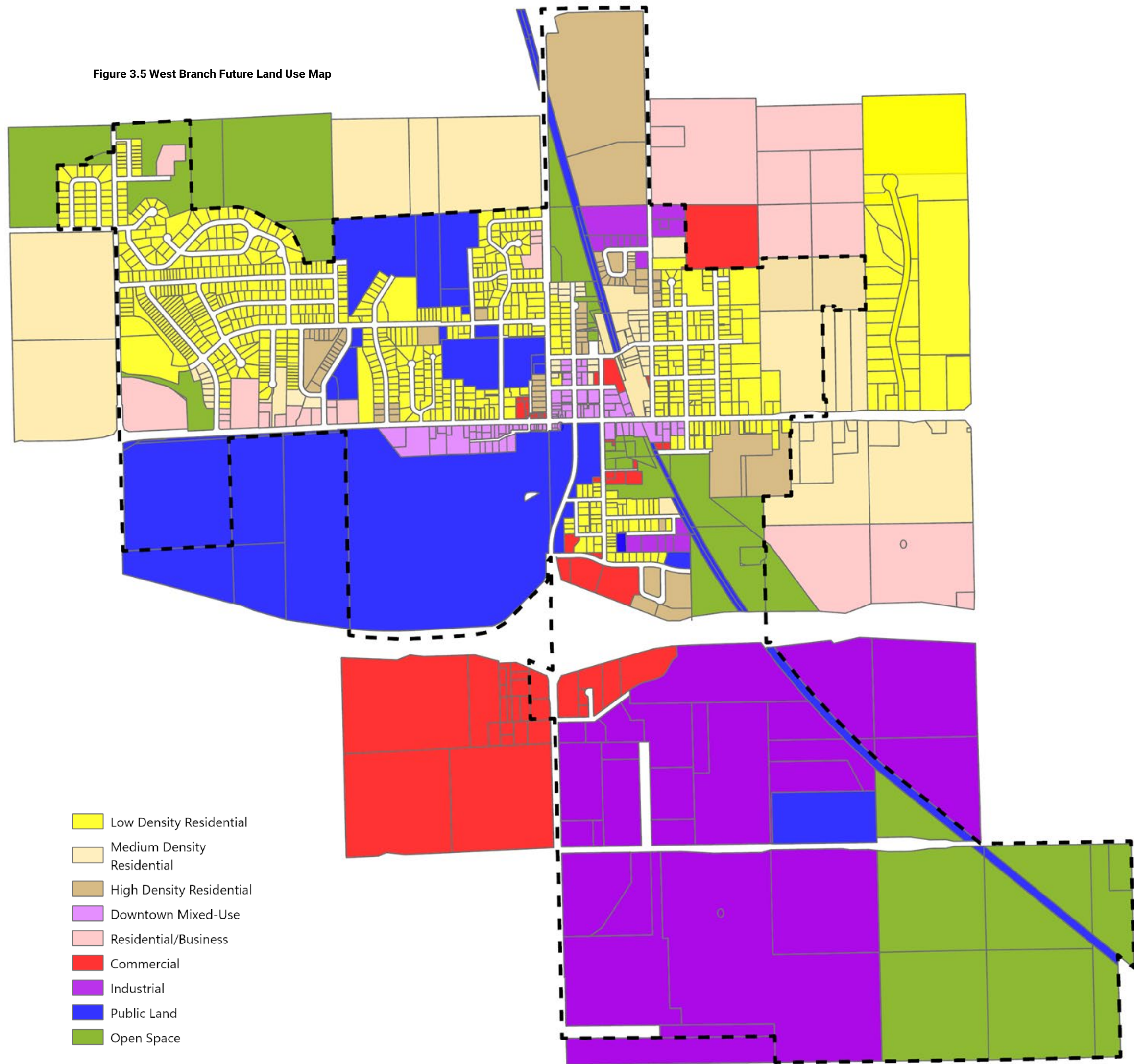
- Infill development should be prioritized to utilize existing infrastructure and minimize the need for costly extensions of utilities and services.
- Annexation should occur in areas contiguous with the city boundary.
- Growth should consider existing infrastructure capacity.
- Growth and development should ensure compatibility between land uses.
- Land use should enhance the downtown district as an existing hub of activity.
- Floodplain development should be discouraged; areas that support natural systems can support recreation and access to open space.
- Development should align with community character and preserve historic assets.

- Clear, consistent, and easily administered development regulations are critical to effective land use management.

In addition to these best practices, the planning also evaluated site suitability in the 2-mile buffer around West Branch, guided in part by the land development toolkit in the 2018 Cedar County Comprehensive Plan. The analysis examined whether certain physical barriers would limit development potential, including slopes 12% or greater, erodible soil, and shallow bedrock. The analysis did not flag any areas as unsuitable for development within the 2-mile fringe area.

Figure 3.5 shows the future land use plan for West Branch. Each parcel is assigned a land use category corresponding with the list following the map and illustrated in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.5 West Branch Future Land Use Map



Land Use Categories

High Density Residential – intended to promote compact development near downtown. Other compatible land uses that may be permitted in this zone include local parks, child day care centers, institutions, religious centers, and educational uses.

Medium Density Residential – includes a variety of housing units at moderate density levels, including duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, and medium multi-unit apartment buildings.

Low Density Residential – designed for low density residential development containing single-family detached houses and may contain other types of low density housing such as zero lots and duplexes.

Downtown Mixed-use – blends residential, commercial, office, civic, historic sites, and entertainment uses. The building plans in this zone are expected to include ground-floor retail and second-floor residential or office uses.

Residential/Business – balances housing and small business development within the same lot to accommodate small in-house businesses that align with existing neighborhood character.

Commercial - intended to accommodate commercial activities, including retail, service, office, and other similar uses for commercial activity.

Institutional – includes public facilities and other facilities for the welfare of the community. Examples of such areas include educational facilities, administrative offices, library buildings, schools, and recreational centers.

Public Land / Utility – intended to reserve land for infrastructure needed to provide essential city services, such as water treatments facilities, lagoons, and waste management.

Industrial – intended for manufacturing, storage, warehousing, shipping, and other highly intense forms of industrial uses, which could result in noise, traffic, and air pollution. Often located near major transportation routes.

Figure 3.6 AI-generated illustration of land use categories



Future Considerations

As the community grows and evolves, the built environment will likely change to meet the needs of residents and businesses.

One example of this evolution in the Future Land Use Map is the expansion of the downtown district footprint. The newly renovated Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, as well as improvements to interchanges along Interstate 80, will undoubtedly increase the number of visitors to the community. The combination of population growth and increased tourism activity could support small business development, bringing in new public revenue and introducing new services and amenities for residents. The expansion of the downtown district would allow for this type of development, while also acknowledging that a significant portion of downtown is currently located in the 100-year flood plain and exposed to risk.

Population growth also generates a need for enhanced public safety. During the recent capital improvement planning process, the fire and police chiefs both expressed a need for updating and expanding facilities to meet the needs of

current and future residents. For example, the fire station cannot currently store a ladder truck, which is an important safety consideration for new buildings with three or more floors. Notably, the current public safety building is also located in the floodway. Building a new facility outside of the floodplain is a future land use need to monitor closely.

Many residents want expanded opportunities for recreation within West Branch. The desire for a new recreation facility came up frequently during public engagement. The recently completed five-year Capital Improvement Plan prioritizes more urgent needs, indicating that a rec center may be a future consideration that would require public land. Similarly, parks and open space will be a consideration for land use as the population grows.

Preservation of prime agricultural land may also be an important consideration for the future growth area. The Cedar County Comprehensive Plan recommends a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) to determine the development suitability for unincorporated land in Cedar

County. The LSA analysis considers a variety of factors that result in an overall score, which informs decision making for county administrators and supervisors. Corn Suitability Rating (CSR) is one of the factors and is often cited as a consideration for preservation and development.

West Branch has experienced expansion toward the west, including a neighborhood in Johnson County. The Cedar County plan and LESA analysis doesn't cover land use for Johnson County. West Branch officials should maintain communication with staff in both Cedar County and Johnson County on extraterritorial land use regulations and annexations.

As West Branch navigates shifting demographics, infrastructure changes, and local economic opportunities, the Future Land Use Map should be reviewed and updated, approximately every 5 to 10 years, in addition to the ongoing amendments made as property owners and developers receive approval for zoning changes.

Conclusion

Land use is one of the most important components of a comprehensive plan because it establishes a long-term vision for how a community will grow, develop, and preserve its unique character. The pattern of residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, industrial areas, public facilities, parks, agricultural land, and natural resources influences nearly every aspect of community life.

The analysis presented in this chapter highlights the importance of intentional and coordinated land use planning in shaping West Branch’s future growth. Existing land use patterns, available vacant land, and development suitability all indicate that the city is well-positioned to accommodate moderate growth within its current boundaries. However, long-term growth would likely require annexation of land contiguous with the city borders.

The evaluation of alternative growth scenarios demonstrates that different development patterns carry distinct tradeoffs in terms of infrastructure costs, environmental sustainability, community character, and long-term economic

viability. While a continuation of existing patterns may be the most straightforward approach, more coordinated strategies offer greater long-term efficiency and resilience.

Moving forward, West Branch’s land use strategy should prioritize development patterns that make efficient use of existing infrastructure, support economic activity, and preserve the community’s character and historic identity. The preferred direction will be implemented through alignment with zoning regulations, capital improvement planning, and targeted development tools.

Due to recent state legislation that sets limits on growth of property tax revenue, city leaders will have to carefully weigh the cost and benefits of new development, especially if it requires extending costly infrastructure to greenfield sites.

This framework establishes a clear foundation for guiding future land use decisions and ensuring that growth occurs in a manner that is both sustainable and consistent with community goals.



Go more in depth with the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A.



Expanding Green Spaces



Managing Greenfield Development



Walking Distance to Greenspace



Peer Community: North Liberty Parks

Goal LU1 Create an attractive, efficient, and coherent built environment that reinforces historic identity and long-term community stability.	Objective LU1.1 Promote contiguous, compact development patterns. • Strategy LU1.1a Prioritize and encourage infill development. • Strategy LU1.1b Consistently review and update zoning ordinances, including residential density, to support emerging development patterns and housing markets • Strategy LU1.1c Coordinate and manage development and annexations in the 2-mile buffer with Cedar County and Johnson County. • Strategy LU1.1d Maintain high levels of walkability in existing and new neighborhoods and address infrastructure needs accordingly. Objective LU1.2 Promote a unique architectural urban form rooted in the history of West Branch. • Strategy LU1.2a Establish design standards and review processes to ensure new developments are consistent with neighborhood and community character. • Strategy LU1.2b Explore hybrid zoning codes that consider traditional use-based (Euclidean) zoning with design-oriented form-based regulations. • Strategy LU1.2c Prioritize consistent transitions between land uses using approved design standards and guidelines.
--	--

Goal LU2

Improve the market value and use value of underutilized commercial properties and public land.

Objective LU2.1 Increase the use value of commercial and public lands to optimum levels and respond to evolving community needs.

- **Strategy LU2.1a** Prioritize redevelopment of underutilized land currently served by existing infrastructure.
- **Strategy LU2.1b** Encourage the effective implementation of the downtown mixed-use district that encourages home-business opportunities in targeted areas, upper-story residential development, and a vibrant retail and entertainment atmosphere.
- **Strategy LU2.1c** Explore reduction of downtown minimum parking requirement to ensure more efficient use of downtown space.

Objective LU2.2 Improve and maintain the condition of wetlands, open spaces, and nature corridors that also function as amenities for residents and visitors.

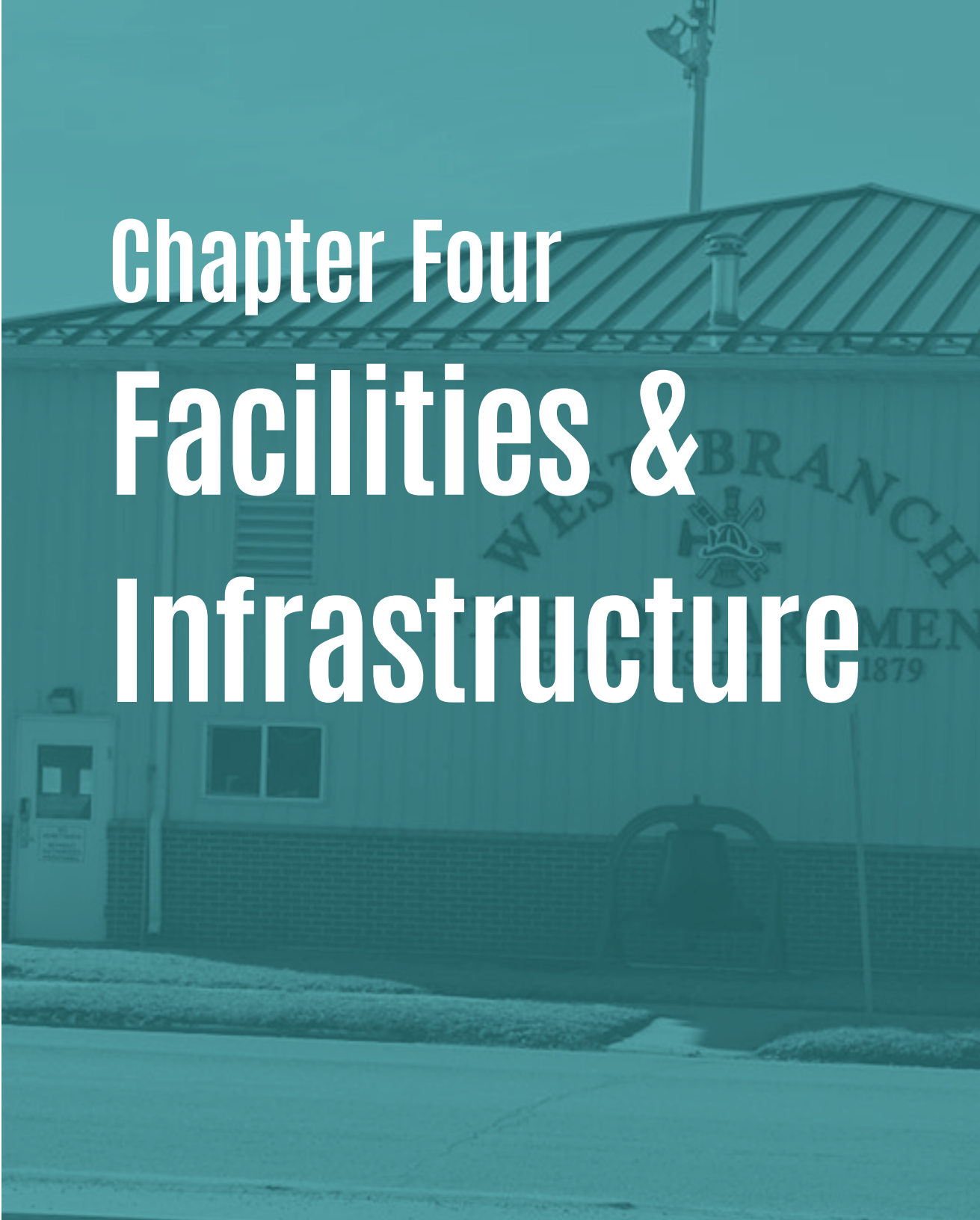
- **Strategy LU2.2a** Create well-planned and maintained nature gardens on wetlands and nature corridors.
- **Strategy LU2.2b** Encourage urban agriculture and community gardens in existing and new developments.

Goal LU3

Improve public safety through safe land use and hazard-resilient development.

Objective LU3.1 Reduce risk to property and health caused by flooding.

- **Strategy LU3.1a** Enforce zoning ordinance that prohibits building in FEMA 100-year floodplain.
- **Strategy LU3.1b** Encourage flood-resilient building and site design.
- **Strategy LU3.1c** Relocate at-risk properties and critical facilities out of the floodway and 100-year floodplain.
- **Strategy LU3.1d** Transition flood-prone areas into greenways and open space.



Chapter Four

Facilities &

Infrastructure

Facilities and Infrastructure Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

West Branch's community facilities, services, and infrastructure systems are resilient, adaptable, and equitably distributed, supporting a growing population, fostering economic vitality, and promoting long-term sustainability and community well-being.

Goals

1. Ensure wastewater and stormwater systems protect public health, safeguard environmental quality, and operate efficiently and equitably.
2. Ensure the City's utility systems remain reliable, resilient, and financially sustainable while protecting public health and meeting future demand.
3. Provide public facilities, service investments, and operations that improve service equity, support economic prosperity, and enhance human and environmental health.
4. Optimize operational efficiency and reduce long-term costs through intergovernmental and interdepartmental collaboration.

Introduction

West Branch's public infrastructure and municipal facilities provide essential systems that support daily life, economic activity, and long-term community stability.

Existing systems generally provide reliable service; however, continued investment and lifecycle management will be necessary to maintain performance, meet regulatory requirements, and support future growth through 2050.

West Branch's infrastructure systems represent a mix of historic and modern construction. Portions of the water and wastewater systems in older neighborhoods are several decades old and will require increasing maintenance attention over time. Similarly, segments of the local street network reflect long service lives and periodic resurfacing rather than full reconstruction. Newer subdivisions incorporate more recent construction standards and materials, which may reduce near-term maintenance burdens but will eventually enter replacement cycles.

The City's long-term infrastructure condition is therefore closely tied to its asset management practices, capital planning discipline, and ability to anticipate lifecycle replacement needs rather than respond reactively to system failures.

Like many Iowa communities, West Branch must balance service expectations with revenue constraints and careful consideration of taxes and fees for residents.

Infrastructure expansion to support growth can increase long-term maintenance obligations if not carefully aligned with realistic development projections. At the same time, deferring capital maintenance can result in higher long-term costs and increased operational risk.

The City's financial position therefore depends on disciplined capital planning, prudent debt management, and consistent rate structures that reflect true lifecycle costs.



Existing Conditions

Municipal facilities have a wide range of functions for West Branch residents. Several facilities reflect phased development over multiple decades, resulting in varying building ages and conditions.

- City Offices, 110 N. Polar St.
- Town Hall, 113 N. 1st St.
- Public Works Building, 33 Cookson Dr.
- Fire Department, 105 S 2nd St.
- Police Station, 105 S 2nd St.
- Public Library, 300 N. Downey St.
- Municipal Cemetery, N. Maple St.
- Water
- Wastewater

City Offices & Council Chambers



City offices and council chambers are located at 110 N Poplar St. The administration staff is made up of the City Administrator, Finance Officer, and City Clerk. The Administration is the first point of contact for many city services like water and garbage services, reserving city facilities, and obtaining permits.

The City Council meets on the first and third Monday of each month at 7p.m. The public is encouraged to attend all City Council meetings.

The City Council appoints residents to the following boards and commissions: animal control, historic preservation, library, parks & recreation, planning & zoning, and the zoning board of adjustment.

Town Hall



West Branch’s Town Hall is located at 113 North 1st Street. The building is 1,000 square feet and has a capacity of 130 people. The building can be reserved by residents and non-residents and offers kitchen appliances and other items useful for gatherings, such as tables and chairs.

City officials have identified the need for repairs and upgrades for the aging structure, including HVAC, ADA accessibility, and other improvements that would extend the useful life of the building. Town Hall improvements are included in FY28 of the recent Capital Improvement Plan, although it is located in the 100-year floodplain. The City may consider an application to the National Register of Historic Places in the future.

Fire Department



The West Branch Fire Department operates out of one station at 105 S 2nd Street, sharing the building with the police department. The building is located in the floodway, which may indicate the need to relocate in the future, especially as demand for services grows with an increasing population and more housing.

The department has a full-time fire chief but is otherwise staffed by over 30 volunteers. The department serves as both a fire service and a Basic Life Support (BLS), non-transport, first responder medical agency.

Due to the nature of their district, the WBFD frequently trains and responds alongside neighboring agencies, including the Iowa City Fire Department, the Johnson County Ambulance

Service, and departments from Tipton, Solon, and West Liberty.

The WBFD operates several specialized vehicles out of their station to handle structure fires, vegetation fires, and motor vehicle accidents.

The department does not have a ladder truck, which may become necessary with the construction of multi-story apartments. However, the existing facility does not have sufficient space to house a ladder truck. Currently, the department works with nearby communities to address calls requiring a ladder truck.

Police Department

The West Branch Police Department provides for the preservation of peace and enforcement of law and ordinances within the corporate limits. The police station is shared with the local Fire Department at 105 2nd St. The department maintains a fleet of 4 police cruisers.

The department consists of the Police Chief and city authorized staffing of up to six officers, including a dedicated School Resource Officer (SRO) who covers the West Branch High School, Middle School, and Hoover Elementary, handling juvenile law, safety education, and drug/alcohol prevention.

WBPD operations are fully integrated with the Cedar County Communications Center.

The Police Department anticipates the need for expansion as the city grows. To support new officers, they may need a new police station, additional squad cars, and equipment.



West Branch Public Library



The public library is located at 300 N. Downey St., close to Hoover Elementary School. The library contains a collection of over 20,000 items, varying from books, print materials, DVDs, puzzles, video games, and more. The library offers over 300 recreational programs and events a year, with a variety for all ages. Public services also include a community room available for reservations and technology access to computers, copiers, laminating, Wi-Fi, and more.

Information from the Capital Improvement Plan indicates that the library building has some structural and foundation concerns, and it is in the 100-year floodplain. Additionally, space constraints pose challenges for programming. A new library facility will be a consideration for future capital investment.

Parks and Recreation



West Branch Parks and Recreation Department works to improve the quality of West Branch residents' lives through parks, trails, and activities. Residents can enjoy the Hoover Nature Trail, multiple parks, and other recreation activities such as youth soccer, t-ball, football, basketball, volleyball and more. More details about park facilities can be found in Chapter 7.

The community and City seek to improve current parks with new play structures, shade structures, and new trails. The 2028-32 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes upgrades to the Baranek Park playground and expansion of the Herbert Hoover Highway Trail and Rail Trail to connect to a larger regional trail networks. A community splash pad and community recreation center were also identified but not selected for the recent CIP.

Cemetery



The West Branch Municipal Cemetery is located on North Maple Street in West Branch. Lots may be purchased at the West Branch City Office, 110 N Poplar St. A portion of each lot sale goes toward a perpetual care fund that provides ongoing maintenance for the cemetery grounds. The Public Works Department personnel organizes cemetery clean-up twice each year.

The cemetery is nearing full capacity of existing lots, but additional grounds exist to accommodate expansion, which has been identified as a need for the near future.

Public Works

The Public Works Department ensures the operation and maintenance of the city’s infrastructure. They maintain the upkeep of city buildings and grounds; provide road maintenance including snow removal, repair, and cleaning; and ensures the operation of sewer and water services. The City of West Branch provides water, sewer, trash and recycling services for its residents within the city limits.

Water System



The city operates a municipal water system that provides potable water service to residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional users within the incorporated area. The system includes groundwater supply, treatment, storage, and distribution components. Water service coverage is largely consistent with the developed footprint

of the community, with distribution lines concentrated in established residential neighborhoods and commercial corridors and services running to 31 parcels located just outside of city boundaries on 290th St and Pheasant Run.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources requires that firm source capacity, a common indicator of water system capacity, shall equal or exceed the peak day demand. The system has historically met regulatory requirements for drinking water quality and provides adequate pressure and fire flow within developed areas.

Table 6.1 shows the existing city water data. Gallons Per Minute (GPM) and Million Gallons per Day (MGD) are indicators for supply capacity.

Meters throughout the water system track the amount of water that makes its way from source to faucet. A small amount of water loss is expected, around 15% of total use. Water reports from the city indicated that over 39% of system water was lost in 2022. Updates to modernize water infrastructure including pipes, metering stations, and other facilities will reduce loss and promote long term sustainability.

Table 6.1 West Branch Well Capacity

Well No.	Source	Depth (feet)	Year Drilled	Current Capacity (gpm)	Current Capacity (mgd)
4	Silurian-Aquifer	445	1979	330	0.475
5	Silurian-Aquifer	400	1992	450	0.648
6	Jordan-Aquifer	1,528	2005	715	1.029
Total Capacity				1,495 gpm	2.152
Firm Capacity				780 gpm	1.123

Ongoing maintenance of aging distribution lines in older portions of the community remains an important consideration as the system continues to mature. A critical need includes replacing filters. Water filters have a standard operational life of around 20 years with West Branch’s being in use for more than 50 years. This threatens infrastructure and water quality.

Public works staff have identified replacements of North Downey and North Loop of Greenview water mains along with a renovation of Main Street’s water main as priority projects.

Waste Water System



West Branch operates a municipal wastewater collection and treatment system serving the incorporated area. Residents living outside city boundaries operate on-site septic systems.

Renovations to the wastewater treatment system south of I-80 finished in 2024 to meet updated standards enforced by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources; the new facility added an aerated lagoon and a Submerged Attached Growth Reactor, a treatment that removes more ammonia before expelling water into Wapsi Creek.

Continued attention to system maintenance, pipe rehabilitation, and long-term capacity planning will be necessary as infrastructure ages and regulatory standards evolve. Public works staff have identified Thomas Drive as a priority for

sewer main replacement. Staff have also requested televising sewer mains in central and northern portions of town.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater infrastructure in West Branch consists of a combination of enclosed storm sewer systems, open drainage channels, and natural waterways. Public Works empowers residents to take stormwater management into their own hands by offering a Stormwater Best Management Practices (BMP) Program to residents. Residents can apply and receive 500 dollars or 50% of project cost (whichever is lower) to implement a BMP project that is in accordance with the Iowa Stormwater Management Manual.

West Branch completed a creek widening project along Wapsi Creek downstream of the city in 2026 following a similar project completed on the Hoover Creek in 2020. The project improves stormwater capacity in downstream areas to reduce Main Street flooding.

BMPs within city boundaries include filter strips and riparian buffers around creek banks, rain gardens on private residential properties, and bioswales along East and West Main Street

As rainfall intensity and frequency patterns shift over time, the adequacy of existing stormwater facilities and the protection of downstream resources will remain ongoing planning considerations.

Electric, Natural Gas, and Communications Infrastructure

Electric and natural gas services are provided to the community through regulated utility providers. These systems are generally reliable and have supported both residential growth and commercial development. Alliant Energy provides electric and gas service for the majority of the residents in West Branch. Linn County REC provides electric service (only) for residents on the west side of town from Ridge View Drive and west to Cedar-Johnson Road.

Phone, cable, and internet services are provided by Liberty Communications, Mediacom, and several other providers. The City of West Branch provides information on their website for residents to set up utility services.

Conclusion

West Branch’s public infrastructure and municipal facilities provide the essential systems that support daily life, economic activity, and long-term community stability.

Public facilities and gathering spaces help foster civic engagement and opportunities for recreation. They connect residents with administrators and elected officials while also build social cohesion in the community. City offices, Town Hall, the Public Library, parks, and other facilities will continue to play an important role in daily life in West Branch.

The City’s infrastructure network reflects both historic development patterns and recent growth pressures. Infrastructure capacity meets current demand across utility systems, which generally provide reliable service, though continued investment and lifecycle management will be necessary to ensure long-term performance and regulatory compliance through 2050.

Facility upgrades, accessibility improvements, and space planning considerations will continue to shape long-term capital needs into the future. As

community needs change over time, public facilities and infrastructure must remain adaptable. Emerging technologies, changing demographics, and evolving service expectations will require ongoing evaluation and periodic updates to infrastructure priorities. Regular assessment of public assets, financial conditions, and service levels will help ensure that investments continue to reflect community needs and support sustainable growth. The 5-year Capital Improvement Plan is a tool for evaluating and prioritizing infrastructure needs and investments.

Ultimately, the long-term success of West Branch depends on maintaining infrastructure systems that are safe, efficient, and financially sustainable. Through responsible fiscal management, strategic capital planning, and continued collaboration with residents, partner agencies, and utility providers, West Branch can optimize past investments while building a stronger, more resilient community for the future.



Go more in depth with the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A.

-  **Grey Water**
-  **Solar Opportunities**
-  **Building Energy Use**
-  **Retrofitting Buildings**
-  **Hybrid Fire Department Staffing**
-  **Shared Public Safety Facility**
-  **Cadet Residence Model**
-  **PFAS in Firefighter Gear**
-  **Light Pollution & Outdoor Lighting**

Goal F1

Ensure wastewater and stormwater systems protect public health, safeguard environmental quality, and operate efficiently and equitably.

Objective F1.1 Reduce peak wet-weather inflow and infiltration (I&I) from stormwater.

- **Strategy F1.1a** Continue to develop and promote West Branch’s Best Management Practices (BMP) initiative to reduce stormwater runoff on public and private property.
- **Strategy F1.1b** Incorporate Inflow & Infiltration reduction projects into the Capital Improvements Plan and coordinate funding with state and federal programs where eligible.

Objective F1.2 Maintain full compliance with all applicable EPA and Iowa DNR wastewater discharge and stormwater regulations.

- **Strategy F1.2a** Conduct a comprehensive wastewater system evaluation to identify priority rehabilitation areas and cost-effective capital improvements.
- **Strategy F1.2b** Maintain full regulatory compliance while reducing peak wet-weather flows, with progress reported through permit reporting.

Objective F1.3 Evaluate and, where feasible, implement system consolidation to improve long-term fiscal sustainability and service equity.

- **Strategy F1.3a** Complete a technical and financial feasibility study evaluating potential consolidation of West Branch and West Branch Village wastewater treatment facilities, including capital costs, rate impacts, and operational implications. If analysis demonstrates long-term fiscal neutrality or savings and equal or improved level-of-service standards, integrate consolidation into the City’s phased capital program.

Goal F2

Ensure the City’s utility systems remain reliable, resilient, and financially sustainable while protecting public health and meeting future demand.

Objective F2.1 Maintain firm water source capacity, ensuring water pressure remains above peak need.

- **Strategy F2.1a** Conduct water supply capacity verification at least every five years as part of capital planning updates.

Objective F2.2 Reduce total system-wide water loss.

- **Strategy F2.2a** Implement meter replacement, leak detection, and targeted main rehabilitation programs to reduce unaccounted-for water.

Objective F2.3 Maintain infrastructure replacement schedules that reduce long-term operational risk and lifecycle costs.

- **Strategy F2.3a** Replace undersized water mains and aging infrastructure in coordination with street reconstruction projects.
- **Strategy F2.3b** Update water rate models periodically to ensure adequate reserve funding for operations, maintenance, and capital replacement.

Objective F2.4 Maintain utility rates that are financially sustainable while minimizing undue burden on residents.

- **Strategy F2.4a** Develop public education initiatives promoting water conservation and cost-saving practices.
- **Strategy F2.4b** Develop a public awareness campaign informing residents of existing cooperative energy solutions.

Goal F3 Provide public facilities, service investments, and operations that improve service equity, support economic prosperity, and enhance human and environmental health.	Objective F3.1 Expand and modernize emergency service facilities and staffing capacity to meet projected population growth and service demand. • Strategy F3.1a Design, fund, and construct a joint public safety facility housing both the West Branch Police and Fire Departments in a location outside the FEMA-regulated floodplain, sized to accommodate projected staffing levels, modern apparatus storage needs, living quarters for hybrid staffing, and dedicated training and administrative space. • Strategy F3.1b Develop and implement a phased transition plan for the West Branch Fire Department to move from a fully volunteer model toward a sustainable hybrid department with structured full-time leadership and dedicated daytime staffing coverage while maintaining a strong volunteer base. • Strategy F3.1c Monitor police staffing needs and adjust staffing levels over time to remain consistent with national service benchmarks while maintaining fiscal sustainability. Objective F3.2 Increase community awareness of and participation in community programming and services. • Strategy F3.2a Adopt and implement a coordinated Community Outreach and Communications Plan to expand community engagement and improve awareness of available services and programming. • Strategy F3.2b Expand the library’s reach within the community through partnerships between local organizations that cross-promote services and co-host collaborative programs.
---	---

Goal F4

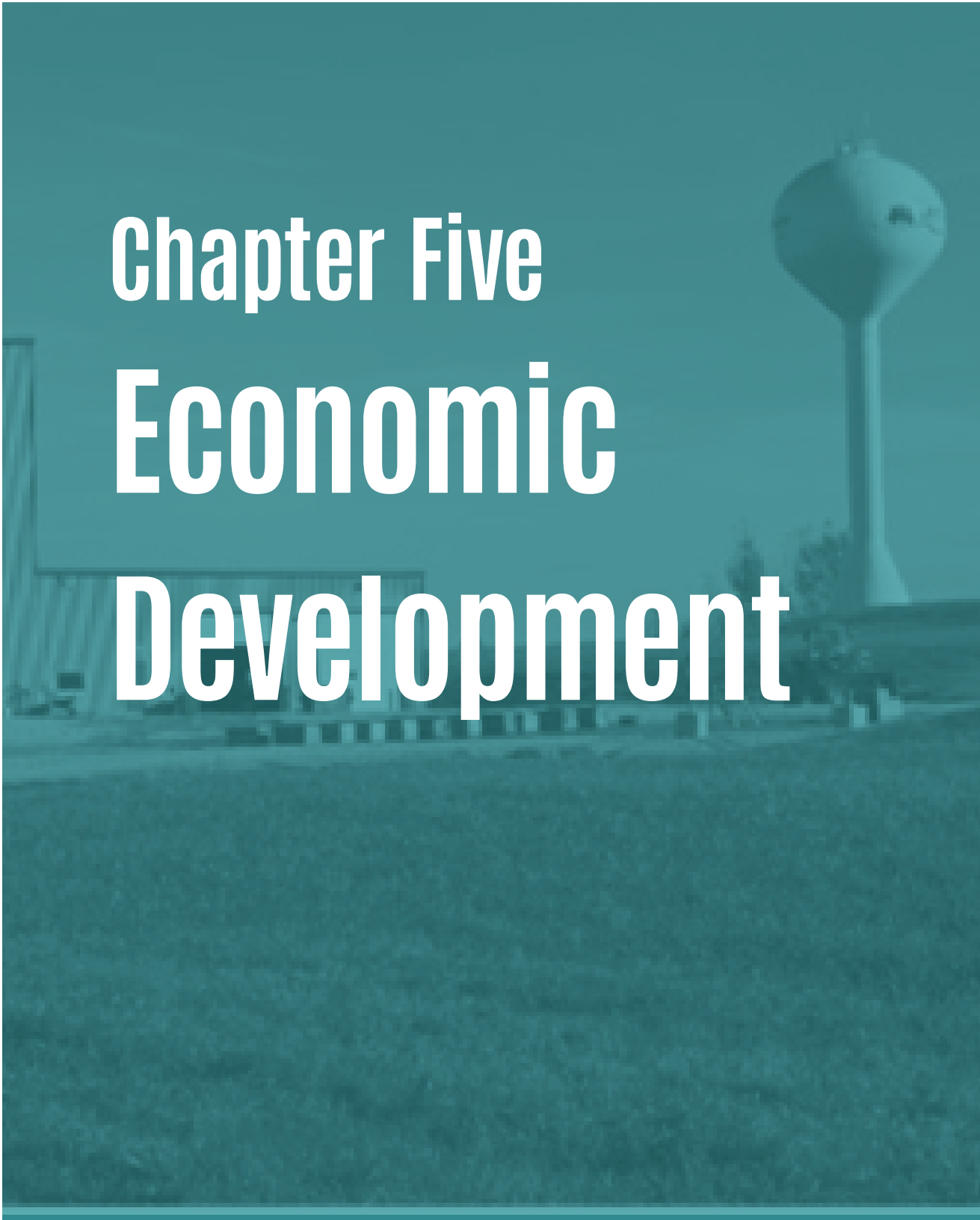
Increase operational efficiency and reduce long-term costs through intergovernmental and interdepartmental collaboration.

Objective F4.1 Maintain a structured five-year Capital Improvements Program that balances new infrastructure investment with maintenance and replacement of existing facilities.

- **Strategy F4.1a** Adopt a formal five-year CIP framework that evaluates infrastructure condition, service demand, and funding capacity when prioritizing capital projects.
- **Strategy F4.1b** Conduct regular CIP review sessions involving department directors and the City Administrator to reassess priorities, update cost estimates, and ensure alignment with comprehensive plan goals.
- **Strategy F4.1c** Explore creative funding pathways to design, construct, and maintain a community center that expands gathering spaces and recreation options, including the possibility of a new home for the public library.

Objective F4.2 Increase regional coordination and fiscal efficiency by identifying and pursuing shared-service opportunities for municipal functions

- **Strategy F4.2a** Evaluate opportunities for shared-service agreements with neighboring municipalities for specialized or high-cost technical positions, including wastewater operations, public safety, or administrative services.
- **Strategy F4.2b** Develop and implement cost-sharing or shared-staff agreements where analysis demonstrates improved service delivery or long-term fiscal savings.



Chapter Five

Economic Development

Economic Development Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

West Branch has a resilient, diverse, and locally rooted economy that builds on its strategic location, historic character, and strong sense of community. The city supports the growth and retention of local businesses, fosters entrepreneurship, and attracts targeted industries that align with their workforce and infrastructure. By investing in workforce development, housing, and quality-of-life amenities, West Branch is a competitive and desirable place for residents and employers alike. Through thoughtful planning and regional collaboration, the community expands economic opportunities, strengthens its tax base, and ensures long-term prosperity while preserving the small-town character that defines West Branch.

Goals

1. Create a supportive environment for local businesses and improve quality of life indicators to increase attractiveness to regional workforce.
2. Improve and redevelop underutilized commercial properties.
3. Provide workforce development opportunities to meet local needs.
4. Leverage West Branch's historic assets to attract new business and retail

Introduction

Economic development focuses on increasing economic activity that expands the city's tax base, ensures good job opportunities for residents, strengthens small businesses, support entrepreneurs, and increases overall quality of life. This chapter highlights existing conditions and outlines goals and objectives to guide economic development in West Branch.

West Branch's economy has long been defined by a combination of small businesses, light industry. And heritage tourism. Its location along Interstate 80, proximity to the Iowa City and Cedar Rapids metropolitan areas, and strong sense of community have helped the city maintain a resilient local economy while preserving the small-town character that residents value.

As the community continues to grow and adapt to changing economic conditions, West Branch can seek to capitalize on emerging opportunities that strengthen the businesses, workforce, and institutions that have served as the foundation of its success.

Strategic economic development considers the communities competitive advantages and assets. The city's historic downtown, the presence of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum and surrounding historic attractions, and its convenient regional access provide unique competitive advantages that distinguish West Branch from many peer communities.

At the same time, changing workforce demographics, evolving retail trends, housing availability, infrastructure needs, and increasing regional competition present challenges that require thoughtful planning and coordinated action.

This chapter establishes a framework for strengthening West Branch's economy over the next two decades by supporting business retention and expansion, encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation, promoting workforce development, expanding tourism and recreation-based economic opportunities, and ensuring the community is prepared for responsible growth.



Existing Conditions

West Branch’s economy is increasingly integrated into the broader Iowa City regional labor and housing market. The city has operated primarily as a bedroom community for the Iowa City metro region. As the broader region continues to experience growth and development pressure, West Branch has an opportunity to tap into this growth for economic development.

The local economy is supported by a diversified base of small businesses, light industrial activity, retail and service employment, and tourism tied to the community’s historic identity and Interstate 80 location. Specifically, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum serves as an important anchor establishment for the community.

Employment

While the city benefits from relatively strong household incomes and steady residential growth, its employment base remains modest in scale. Many residents choose to commute to

nearby employment centers such as Iowa City and Cedar Rapids for job opportunities.

Figure 5.1 shows the inflow and outflow of West Branch workers for 2023. A total of 846 employees commute into West Branch for work, while 1,258 West Branch residents travel to another city for work and 99 people both live and work in West Branch.

Figure 5.2 shows the top ten cities where West Branch residents are employed for 2023. A significantly large portion (405) work in Iowa City, compared to residents who live and work in West Branch (99). Roughly 10% of West Branch workers are employed in the community, while the rest commute elsewhere for work. The data illustrates that West Branch largely functions as a bedroom community for the Iowa City metro.

Figure 5.2 Employment Inflow/Outflow
Source: Census on the Map 2023

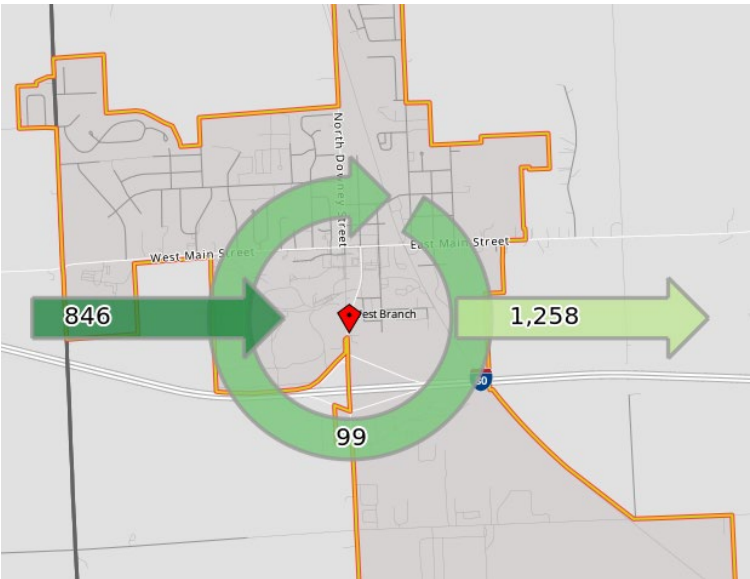
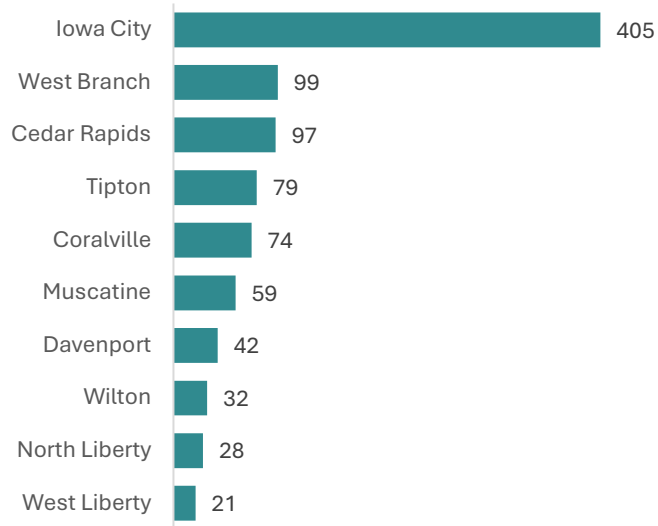


Figure 5.2 Top Ten Cities of Employment for West Branch Workers
Source: Census on the Map 2023



Attractive employment opportunities in neighboring cities can create competition for West Branch workers and challenges for local businesses, particularly as many residents choose to work in Iowa City or Cedar Rapids in search of larger firms and higher wages.

Table 5.1. West Branch Employment by Sector, 2023

Industry	%
Health Care and Social Assistance	20.6%
Manufacturing	12.6%
Retail Trade	10.4%
Educational Services	9.7%
Professional, Scientific, Technical	7.8%
Other Services	7.2%
Wholesale Trade	4.4%
Finance and Insurance	4.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	4.3%
Accommodation and Food	4.0%
Public Administration	3.6%
Construction	3.4%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	2.2%
Agriculture	1.1%
Information	1.1%
Utilities	1.1%
Real Estate	0.9%
Administrative and Waste Management	0.9%
Mining, Quarrying, Oil and Gas	0.4%
Management	0.0%

Table 5.1 shows the proportion of West Branch workers by sector. Health care and social assistance is the largest employment sector (20.6%), likely due to Iowa Healthcare hospitals and clinics. West Branch health care establishments include the Iowa Healthcare primary care facility on Cookson Drive and the non-profit Crestview Specialty Care Center. Also included in this category are dental offices and childcare centers like the West Branch Community Day Care Center and Run-A-Muck Daycare. Manufacturing and Retail Trade are the next two highest categories – West Branch is home to businesses in both sectors.

Industry

West Branch’s industrial park south of I-80 provides tax revenue and employment opportunities in the local economy. Businesses include Procter & Gamble, Newport Industries, Wasuau Supply Company, Altorfer Ag Products, U.S. AutoForce, Croell: Ready Mix Concrete, and Nordex USA. Nordex, a wind turbine manufacturer, is the largest employer among West Branch companies anticipates further expansion in the future.

Croell: Ready Mix Concrete was previously located near downtown but has recently relocated to the industrial park (Figure 5.5). This relocation created an opportunity for the redevelopment of the previous site into the Heritage Hill residential neighborhood.

Figure 5.5 Croell: Ready Mix Concrete facility



The West Branch industrial park has room to expand and offers excellent transportation access to Interstate-80. The 100-year flood plain passes through some undeveloped industrial parcels, potentially limiting the land availability.

Commercial

Commercial businesses are a significant portion of economic activity in West Branch. The main commercial district in West Branch can be found on Main Street. This area is at the heart of downtown and is adjacent to the Herbert Hoover Historic Site. Main Street contains a diverse mix of businesses and establishments, including bars and restaurants, cafes, and even dentist offices. The only grocery store in West Branch, Dewey’s Jack & Jill, can also be found on Main Street. Clothing shops and gifts shops enhance the visitor experience for tourists.

Main Street is a moderately dense area that allows for a greater concentration of businesses. This development style is demonstrated in Figure 5.3, which shows Heritage Museum and the surrounding structures.

Besides the downtown core on Main Street, there is a Ford dealership on the west side of town. This dealership is major draw for the city to bring in revenue from outside sources. West Branch also has a commercial node south of I-80, featuring convenience stores, fuel, fast food, a

hotel and other businesses that cater to the nearly 40,000 travelers that use I-80 each year.

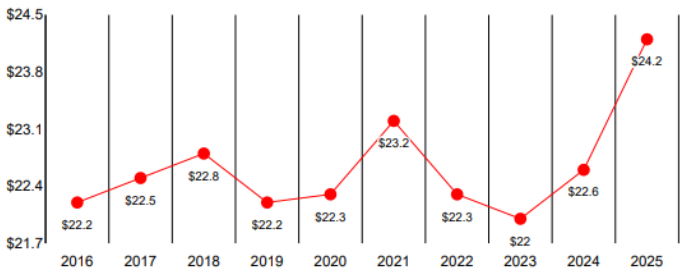


Retail Sales Analysis

Retail sales is an economic indicator that can help identify needs and opportunities for future activity.

According to the 2025 Retail Trade Analysis from Iowa State University, West Branch experienced a significant increase in the total amount of taxable sales in 2025 (about \$24 million) compared to recent years (Figure 5.4). The year-over-year increase from 2024 was 7.1%.

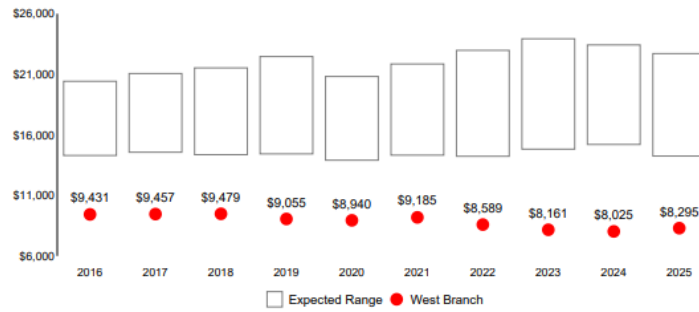
Figure 5.4 Real Total Taxable Sales (in \$ millions)
Source: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach



The average sales per capita also increased 3.4% from 2024 to 2025. However, as seen in Figure 5.5, sales per capita in West Branch is well below expectations based on comparisons with peer communities in the state.

The trends show that West Branch has less retail activity than similar communities, potentially due to a smaller number of total firms and the clusters of retail districts in nearby communities. Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty offer consumers a wide range of retail opportunities, and many people use online shopping services like Amazon. This creates a challenging market for West Branch to capture retail sales and points to the need to create unique shopping experiences.

Figure 5.4 Expected and Actual Sales per Capita
Source: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach



Some of the lack in retail sales could stem from the typical business hours for shops and restaurants. There are seldom times when most of the businesses in the area are all open and operational simultaneously. Additionally, some businesses only have weekend hours due to staffing and affordability issues. This creates challenges for visitors who would like to visit multiple locations during a single trip as each business operates on a unique, individual schedule.

Tourism

More than its industrial park and commercial nodes, West Branch is best known for its connection to important U.S. history. The

Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum and the National Historic Site are significant tourism destinations that attract visitors from all over the country and beyond.

The Herbert Hoover Library and Museum closed temporarily for a \$20 million top-to-bottom renovation. Representatives expect that the newly updated facility will significantly increase visits, presenting an opportunity for West Branch to capture greater economic activity through heritage tourism. The Hoover Presidential Foundation works to strengthen the Hoover legacy and attractions by “inspiring leadership, service, and civic responsibility grounded in the Hoovers’ life and values.”

West Branch is also home to the Heritage Museum, which preserves and commemorates the history of the town. Additionally, Traveler’s Rest is a historic 1855 inn on East Main Street that served as a key Underground Railroad station for abolitionist John Brown. These assets are all vital parts of the West Branch history shared with over 35,000 visitors each year.

The largest proportion of out-of-state visitors to West Branch come from the Chicago area. There

are also many visitors each year from Des Moines, the Quad Cities, and other major cities in Iowa. Most visitors come for a single day or stay just one night. Additionally, roughly 75% of these trips occur between Friday and Monday. Maximizing commercial business hours on these days may provide valuable opportunity to tap into a larger market.

Main Street West Branch



Main Street West Branch exists at the intersection of retail, historic preservation, tourism, and social life in West Branch.

As part of the network of Main Street organizations across the state and county, Main Street West Branch employs the model to integrate economic vitality, promotion, and event organization for the benefit of the community. Their small business support services and programming encourage entrepreneurship and job growth. The Main Street framework emphasizes placemaking and enhancing downtown corridors as economic development drivers.

In 2006, West Branch received accreditation from Main Street Iowa and Main Street America after raising over \$166,000 in community pledges to support revitalization of the downtown district. Since then, the organization has contributed to the investment of over \$5,000,000 in West Branch’s historic Main Street (MSWB, 2026).

Figure 5.6 A view of Main Street in West Branch



Main Street West Branch supports the community through a variety of mechanisms. They organize and enlist community donors and volunteers to support projects and events. Programming and funding helps preserve the historic design and character of Main Street and to facilitate and promote community events that engage both locals and visitors.

Main Street West Branch also helps provide opportunities for small businesses. Specifically, Main Street West Branch provides Open 4 Business Grant opportunities and Downtown Enhancement Matching Grants to spur local business and enhance the “downtown experience”. These strategies are all aimed at improving the economic vitality and facilitate growth of West Branch’s commercial interests. Finally, they also help to improve the downtown atmosphere and support building façade projects to create an aesthetically pleasing Main Street. These efforts to improve business help to facilitate spending and create more employment opportunities in West Branch. Continuing to partner with and support Main Street West Branch will be a necessary strategy to sustain economic development momentum.

Prosperity Pathway Interim Development Overlay District

In 2025, West Branch City Council adopted ordinance 821 to include the Prosperity Pathway Interim Development Overlay District (IDO). The temporary district would last three years, unless the city council approves an extension.

The purpose of the Prosperity Pathway IDO is to “temporarily regulate the establishment of uses, construction of new buildings and demolition or alteration of existing structures in the Prosperity Pathway where potential development could be detrimental of have adverse impacts on current planning, land use or zoning studies underway.”

The Main Street and Historic Preservation districts are located entirely within the Prosperity Pathway IDO, which also extends the full length of Main Street from the west side of town to the east (Figure 5.7). Permitted uses include commercial, professional office and service-oriented business. In effect, the Prosperity Pathway IDO allows for the expansion of commercially zoned land that is generally otherwise not available for development.

Figure 5.7 Prosperity Pathway Interim Development Overlay District



State and Regional Partners

The City of West Branch can best leverage its economic development potential through collaborations and partnerships.

As a member of the East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA), West Branch can increase capacity for community and economic development. ECIA has staff that provides services that West Branch could not afford locally or cannot manage on their own. ECIA is also responsible for developing and updated the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region.

With a portion of the community in Johnson County and being just a short distance from Iowa City, West Branch has opportunities to work with Johnson County and Iowa City based service providers. In particular, Greater Iowa City works to “elevate business, invest in strategic initiatives, and advocate for the economic resiliency” of the surrounding area.

The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) is a state agency responsible for supporting economic growth and community development in Iowa. IEDA works with local

governments, businesses, and nonprofits to encourage job creation, private investment, tourism, entrepreneurship, and downtown revitalization. This is accomplished through a variety of mechanisms, including grants and incentive programs that help communities improve infrastructure, rehabilitate historic buildings, expand housing opportunities, and attract new businesses. One of its most widely known initiatives is Main Street Iowa.

Local educational institutions can also play an important role in economic and workforce development. The University of Iowa has engagement and outreach programs that offer services to communities and small businesses. For example, the University of Iowa America’s Small Business Development Center (SBDC) was established in 1982 as one of the four original regional centers in Iowa. The center offers many resources to small business owners, as well as services tailored to fit their needs. Similarly, Kirkwood Community College offers many opportunities for workforce development.

Placemaking and Quality of Life

Economic developers increasingly recognize the importance of building strong, vibrant communities that attract and retain the workforce sought by companies and businesses.

Placemaking describes an intentional effort to plan, design, and maintain unique public spaces that build social cohesion and community resilience. Studies, including the Knight Foundation’s “Soul of the Community” study, have shown that residents feel more “attached” to communities that offer places for residents to meet and engage, foster a welcoming community, and invest in the physical beauty of the community, including green spaces. Outdoor recreation and access to nature are also recognized as an important quality of life amenities. Those investments also appeal to visitors and entrepreneurs, who also value a strong “sense of place.” Residents who aren’t satisfied with quality of life in the community are more easily able to move than in the past, making these efforts an important part of economic development efforts.

Future Considerations

The primary opportunities for increasing economic activity include industry, commerce, and tourism, all supported by a vibrant community, adequate housing, and available workforce.

Industrial Expansion

The West Branch Industrial Park has some remaining undeveloped and underutilized property, with attractive access to transportation infrastructure. The City has invested in infrastructure to serve the park and should continue to pursue opportunities to optimize public investments.

At least one existing company has expressed interest in expansion. West Branch officials could collaborate with Greater Iowa City and IDEA to support existing companies in the park and to potentially market available land to prospective businesses.

Commercial Growth

West Branch is gaining a strong reputation as a destination for day trips and unique shopping

experiences. Main Street West Branch plays a key role in creating a thriving downtown that stimulates retail activity. The City should continue to explore partnerships and strategies that grow small local businesses, including ongoing support for Main Street West Branch.

If historical trends continue, West Branch can expect to see population grow to more than 5,000 residents by 2050. As residential characteristics change, so too could the commercial opportunities that serve the needs of residents and visitors. Through local options sales tax, the City can capture additional revenue as retail sales increase.

Based on current zoning, little land exists for new commercial development. the City should identify underutilized properties in and around downtown that may be appropriate for redevelopment. Additionally, following the overall concept of the Prosperity Pathway IDO, the Future Land Use Map imagines a potentially larger footprint for the downtown district as the community evolves. The map suggest an incremental approach, allowing commercial

development just west of downtown and residential businesses a bit farther west.

Figure 7.13. Redevelopment Opportunity at 315 E Main St.



Completing the downtown streetscape and rerouting heavy truck traffic will improve the retail environment for businesses and shoppers, especially for visitors with disabilities. Future streetscape and downtown improvements should incorporate placemaking principles, such as public art.

Heritage Tourism

Visitors to West Branch will find a variety of unique shops and restaurants that enhance their

stay in the community. The renovations at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Museum and Libraries is expected to draw more visitors to the community. Investing in public spaces and supporting local businesses the Hoover sites will stimulate more heritage tourism.

Visitors do not currently have many options for lodging within West Branch. A future hotel could encourage visitors to spend more time in the community, patronizing local retailers and restaurants, and the City could capture Hotel/Motel tax revenue to support public needs.

Financial Tools

Responsible use of incentives and financial tools can help achieve economic development goals. Examples include façade grants, property tax abatement, revolving loan funds and more.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is another powerful financial tool cities use to support development. TIF allows cities to offer the future property tax revenue generated by improvements within a certain period of time to help finance projects that would not otherwise be possible. A potential drawback is the

increased burden on city services and schools that wouldn't see revenue from the project until the TIF period expires. The City of West Branch has TIF policies that guide the process and provide clarity to developers.

Workforce Development

While West Branch is not a major employment hub, supporting the future workforce will be important to meeting the needs of residents, whether in industrial and commercial jobs or in the local school district. Given its proximity to major regional education institutions, the city is well positioned to strengthen workforce pipelines through strategic partnerships with the University of Iowa and Kirkwood Community College. These institutions collectively represent a significant source of young, educated talent in fields such as healthcare, business, education, and manufacturing.

A key opportunity for West Branch is to actively engage with these institutions to establish a strong partnership. This could include internships or a strong presence at college career fairs. Additionally, advertising West Branch and local events to college students in

Iowa City and Cedar Rapids could help familiarize this demographic with the city and make post-graduate job offers more appealing if a connection already exists.

West Branch could collaborate with Kirkwood Community College to expand access to short-term credentialing and workforce training programs that could be tailored to meet the needs of local businesses. This is especially true in industries such as manufacturing and skilled trades where demand for quality employees will only continue to grow.

Beyond direct employment pipelines, workforce attraction efforts can emphasize West Branch's quality-of-life advantages, including small-town livability, affordability relative to nearby urban centers, and access to regional amenities. By integrating workforce development with housing strategies, downtown vitality, and marketing efforts aimed at young professionals, West Branch can position itself as a desirable alternative to larger metropolitan job centers while still benefiting from their educational infrastructure.

Conclusion

Economic development in West Branch will continue to be shaped by its unique position as a small community within the larger Iowa City metropolitan area. While the city may not compete directly for large-scale employers or major commercial developments, it can thrive by focusing on the qualities that make it distinctive.

A strong sense of community, a historic downtown, a nationally significant heritage tourism destination, access to regional transportation networks, and a high quality of life provide a solid foundation for attracting entrepreneurs, small businesses, remote workers, and residents seeking the benefits of small-town living with convenient access to metropolitan amenities.

The renovation of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, and reopening in August 2026, presents exciting opportunities for economic activity that supports local businesses and enhances quality of life for residents. Main Street West Branch and local

business should continue to enhance the downtown visitor experiences.

Rather than pursuing growth for its own sake, West Branch can focus on sustainable and strategic economic development. Supporting local entrepreneurs, retaining and expanding existing businesses, encouraging investment in commercial districts, and modest industrial growth will strengthen the local economy while reinforcing the community's identity.

The City's success will also depend on collaboration. Many of the opportunities and challenges facing West Branch extend beyond municipal boundaries, making partnerships with regional organizations, neighboring communities, educational institutions, local employers, and community organizations increasingly important.

By aligning economic development efforts with housing, infrastructure, and community assets, West Branch can create a resilient economy that benefits both current and future residents.



Go more in depth with the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A.



Responsible & Strategic Use of TIF



Childcare



Youth Spaces and Support



Case Study: Jefferson Historic Redevelopment



Case Study: Marion Central Plaza Project

Goal ED1

Create a supportive environment for local businesses and improve quality of life indicators to increase attractiveness to regional workforce.

Objective ED1.1 Support small business development and entrepreneurship.

- **Strategy ED1.1a** Strengthen partnership with Main Street West Branch to provide technical assistance for small businesses.
- **Strategy ED1.1b** Promote local, state, and federal programs that support small business.

Objective ED1.2 Increase quality of life amenities to make West Branch more competitive within the region.

- **Strategy ED1.2a** Invest in affordable housing and workforce housing to boost home ownership opportunities and reduce rent burden.
- **Strategy ED1.2b** Prioritize recreational amenities such as parks and trails to improve connectivity and drive spending in the local economy.

Objective ED1.3 Expand and enhance the downtown commercial footprint.

- **Strategy ED1.3a** Evaluate parcels adjacent to downtown district that are suitable for development and allow for home-business uses where appropriate.
- **Strategy ED1.3b** Invest in streetscape improvements that enhance the downtown atmosphere and sense of place.

Goal ED2

Improve and redevelop underutilized commercial properties.

Objective ED2.1 Optimize use and functions for all existing buildings in the Main Street corridor.

- **Strategy ED2.1a** Create and maintain a detailed database of downtown buildings, particularly identifying underutilized properties.
- **Strategy ED2.1b** Provide local incentives and assistance to improve historic building façades.
- **Strategy ED2.2c** Utilize external funding resources, such as the Catalyst grant from the Iowa Economic Development Authority, to support redevelopment opportunities.

Objective ED2.2 Prioritize commercial infill development opportunities.

- **Strategy ED2.2a** Efficiently utilize commercial land within the city limits before considering annexation.
- **Strategy ED2.2b** Collaborate with Main Street West Branch and Greater Iowa City to market and facilitate development opportunities to prospective businesses.

Goal ED3

Provide workforce development opportunities to meet local needs.

Objective ED3.1 Develop the talents and abilities of West Branch employees.

- **Strategy ED3.1a** Support and promote career readiness programs that engage high school students in job shadowing and work-based learning.
- **Strategy ED3.1b** Partner with local educational institutions to support continuing education opportunities.

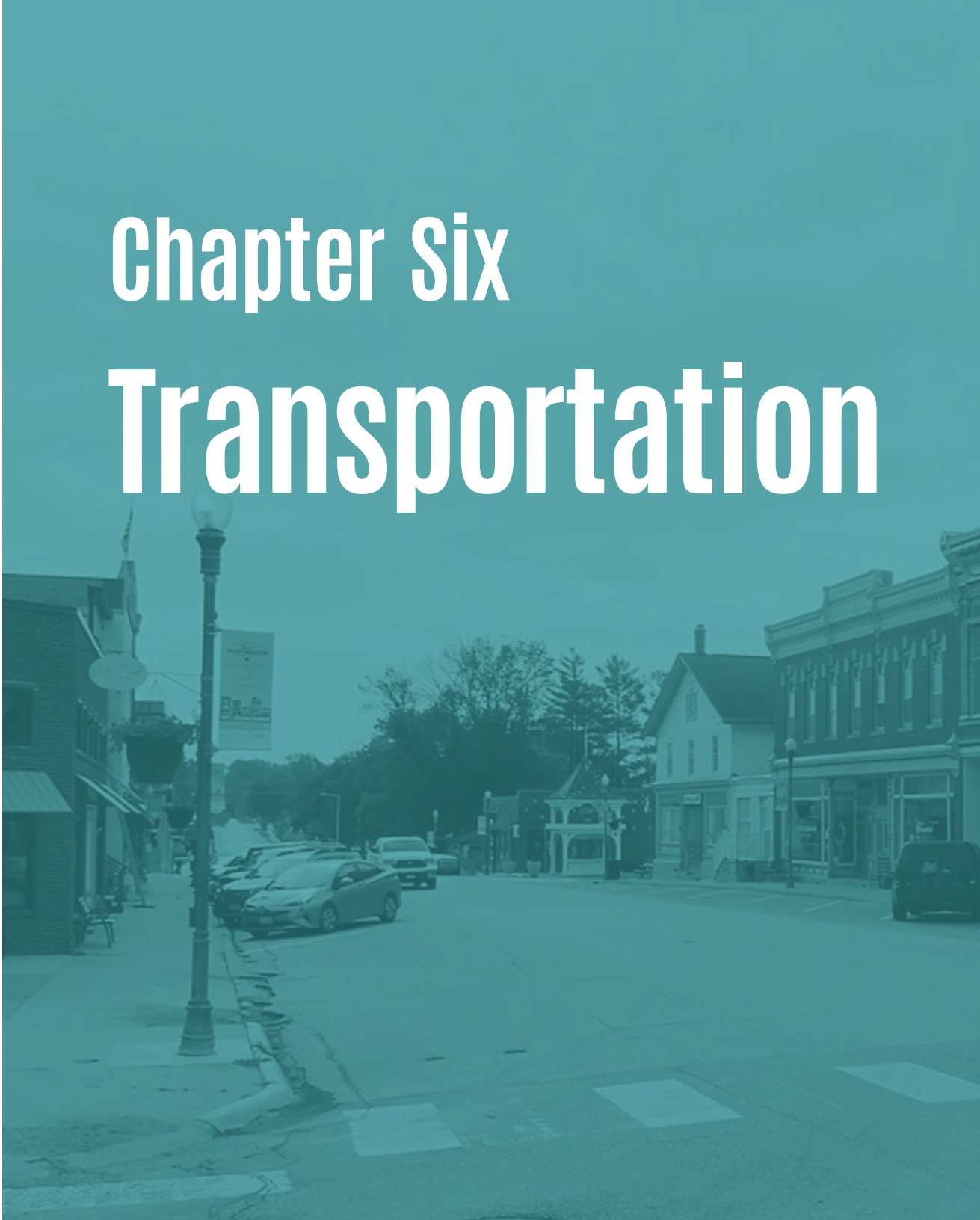
Objective ED3.2 Increase local workforce retention.

- **Strategy ED3.2a** Work with local employers to identify workforce needs and barriers to retaining employees.
- **Strategy ED3.2b** Encourage internships and entry-level employment opportunities to attract young professionals to West Branch.

Objective ED3.3 Add diverse new jobs to the local economy.

- **Strategy ED3.3a** Promote business development and attraction efforts in the West Branch industrial park to attract employers with quality jobs.
- **Strategy ED3.3b** Expand marketing efforts that leverage West Branch’s strategic location in the Corridor along Interstate 80.

Goal ED4 Leverage West Branch’s historic assets to attract new business and retail.	Objective ED4.1 Increase the number of visitors at local businesses and overnight stays. • Strategy ED4.1a Improve pedestrian connection and wayfinding between the Hoover Site and the commercial district to easily facilitate patronage. • Strategy ED4.1b Collaborate with the National Park Service to equip historic site employees with the knowledge and skills to promote other businesses and activities in West Branch. • Strategy ED4.1c Explore opportunities to attract a new hotel.
	Objective ED4.2 Develop a more prominent retail environment. • Strategy ED4.2a Update downtown streetscape and walkability through thoughtful placemaking. • Strategy ED4.2b Coordinate consistent daytime business hours for shops in town.
	Objective ED4.3 Increase attendance at local community events. • Strategy ED4.3a Establish and promote seasonal downtown markets and events to activate the downtown streetscape. • Strategy ED4.3b Work with Main Street West Branch and other community organizations to host local events and market these activities across the region.



Chapter Six

Transportation

Transportation Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

The City of West Branch provides a transportation system characterized by safe, connected, and well-maintained streets, sidewalks, and paths. West Branch's trail system connects parks, schools, neighborhoods, business districts, the National Park Service, and nearby communities. The city's growing network provides safe and accessible routes for walking and biking, linking residents of all ages to recreation, daily destinations, and each other. This connected system enhances quality of life, promote healthy activity, and attract visitors to experience West Branch's community character and natural beauty.

Goals

1. Implement a transportation system that supports multiple modes and diverse users.
2. Support sustainable mobility by providing low-emission and environmentally friendly transportation options.
3. Provide a safe, accessible, and equitable transportation system for all users.
4. Collaborate with other jurisdictions to support improvements to transportation planning and infrastructure.

Introduction

West Branch’s transportation system is vital to daily life within the community and for access throughout the region. Locally, the system supports the movement of people and goods, connecting residents to employment, education, medical care, recreation, and shopping.

Connections to regional transportation networks support economic activity by allowing businesses to efficiently import and export goods, providing access for visitors, and strengthening the city’s role within the broader regional economy.

While transportation provides important benefits, it also presents challenges. Impacts such as pollution, noise, congestion, safety concerns, and maintenance costs can affect quality of life if not properly managed.

In addition, certain populations, including individuals with disabilities, older adults, children, and low-income residents, may face barriers in accessing parts of the transportation system.

The transportation system is not limited to accommodating vehicles only. Safe options for

bicycles and pedestrians is also an important component of transportation planning. A well-connected trail system and sidewalk network helps residents and visitors navigate the city for both commuting and recreation. Cities and states are increasingly investing in this infrastructure because of the many benefits related to health, social connection, visitor attraction, environmental sustainability, and more.

Development and maintenance of transportation infrastructure is a major expense for cities and requires careful planning and programming. Maintaining strong relationships with regional, state, and federal partners is necessary to align goals and resources.

Through this Comprehensive Plan, the City of West Branch aims to support a transportation system that is efficient, accessible, and connected, while minimizing negative impacts. West Branch will continue to improve safety, expand connectivity between transportation modes, and enhance overall system performance to meet current and future needs.



Existing Conditions

Transportation infrastructure in West Branch includes the local street network, sidewalks, and trail systems that support mobility and access.

Transportation Planning

Common to most smaller cities across the country, the City of West Branch coordinates with a regional transportation planning agency, Regional Planning Affiliation 10 (RPA 10—staffed by the East Central Iowa Council of Governments). RPA 10 plans for safe and efficient movement of people and goods across a seven county region, within and between modes of transportation including streets, highways, bicycle, pedestrian, transit, rail, water, and air.

RPA 10 has four committees: Policy Committee, Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC), Regional Trails Advisory Committee (RTAC), and Passenger Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC). There are members from each county, and in 2025, no members on any of the committees were from West Branch.

The RPA 10 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) focuses on transportation-related issues over a 20-year period, with updates every five years. The LRTP provides an explanation of the area’s current transportation trends and a forecast of future transportation issues. Through the LRTP planning process, residents help create the vision and goals that will guide transportation investment within the region over the next 20 years. The LRTP was last updated in 2022.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) identifies transportation investments within the region. All state and federal funding for transportation within the region (except for the Iowa City and Cedar Rapids metros) must be included in the TIP.

The current TIP was adopted in 2025 and covers Fiscal Years 2026-2029. It does not list any projects within West Branch’s city limits. The City should work to encourage city residents and/or staff to become members of RPA 10 committees to encourage full consideration of West Branch projects in future plans and TIPS.

Roadways

The predominant transportation system in West Branch is a network of streets and roadways that carry cars and trucks but also can be utilized by bicyclists. These roadways serve the circulation needs of local residents and visitors.

West Branch’s street system reflects a traditional small-town grid in the historic core, transitioning to more contemporary subdivision layouts in newer residential areas.

Functional Classification

Functional classification is commonly used to describe roadways based on the type of service they provide. In general, roadways serve two primary functions, land access and mobility, and the degree to which each is prioritized determines their classification. Achieving an effective transportation network requires balancing these roles.

- **Principal Arterial** roadways primarily serve a mobility function with minimal land access. They typically prohibit parking and

limit access to land. The primary purpose of principal arterials is the relatively rapid movement of people and goods for extended distances.

Although not meeting all those criteria, the closest roads to principal arterials in West Branch are Main Street (and its extension out of town as Hoover Highway), Parkside Drive, and Baker Avenue.

- **Minor Arterials** interconnect with and augment principal arterials. Minor arterials within areas serve inter-community trips of moderate length. An example in West Branch is Johnson-Cedar Road.
- **Collector** streets channel trips between the local street system and the arterials. An example is Orange Street. Parking and direct driveway access to the street are typically allowed on collectors. Collectors are usually wider, have higher capacity, may have some parking restrictions, and permit somewhat higher speeds than the local street network.
- **Local Streets** primarily provide local land access and offer the lowest level of

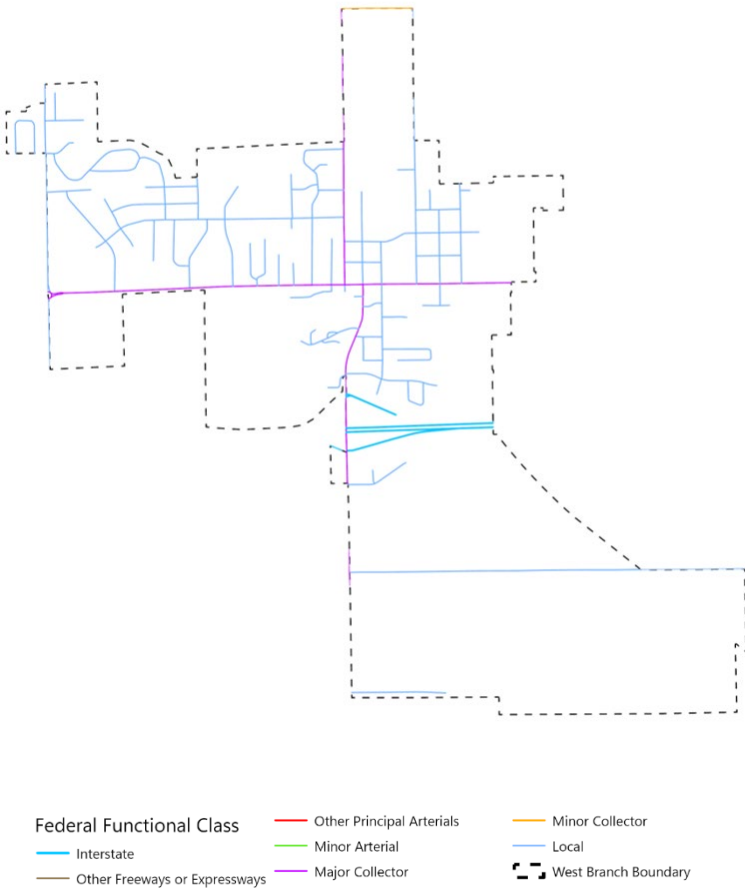
mobility. Characteristics of local streets include uncontrolled intersections, posted speed limits of 25 miles per hour or less, and fewer restrictions on parking.

Table 6.1 presents the total length and share of each within West Branch, and Figure 6.1 illustrates their spatial distribution. Most of the roadways (73.8%) are local streets, nearly 78,000 feet in total length. Aside from Interstate 80, all other roadways fall under the collector classification and make up 18.7% of the total system.

Table 6.1 Lengths of Functional Classifications in West Branch
Source: Iowa Department of Transportation, 2025

Functional Classification	Length in West Branch	Percent of Total
Interstate	8,820 ft	8.4%
Major Collector	17,374 ft	16.5%
Minor Collector	1,311 ft	1.2%
Local	77,599 ft	73.8%

Figure 6.1 Federal Functional Classification of Roadways in West Branch



Traffic Volume

Traffic volume is an important measure for the transportation system. Understanding traffic volume helps engineers and transportation planners design a road system that is appropriate for the community. Traffic volume is measured in Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT), a road’s annual traffic volume divided by 365 days.

Figure 6.2 displays the AADT for West Branch area roads. The data used in this map was collected by the Iowa DOT and the map was made using the data most recently available in 2025. Parkside Drive and Main Street were the most heavily traveled West Branch city streets with 6,100 and 4,950 AADT respectively. Interstate 80 had the highest traffic volume in the area with an AADT of 38,000 in 2024. This increased from a count of 34,400 in 2019. Main Street had an AADT of 1,080 in 2018 and rose to 1,220 when counted in 2022. However, the count in 2022 may also have been low compared to more recent trends due to major reconstruction from Iowa City to West Branch’s city limits. Traffic volume is also influenced by diurnal traffic peaks within the city, such as daily commutes in and out of West Branch and around

schools. Overall, these trends show that traffic is increasing. Many roadways in West Branch have not had a traffic count since the last comprehensive plan was written.

Truck traffic in West Branch is a current concern. According to 2023 AADT data from Iowa DOT, the I-80 West on ramp had a total AADT of 1,010 vehicles, and 16.3% of total vehicles were trucks. Truck AADT is not available for other roadways in West Branch. The percentage of truck traffic is relatively high for a city the size of West Branch.

As of 2025, the truck route in West Branch goes through downtown, causing many negative effects. The truck route causes loud traffic downtown, increased emissions leading to poorer air quality, and trucks have trouble turning on these streets. The city is pursuing an alternative truck route, which can reduce these impacts by moving truck traffic out of the downtown area.

Implementation of a truck re-route plan can help the city minimize negative externalities in the downtown area sourced from truck traffic.

Figure 6.2. Average Annual Daily Traffic on Roadways in West Branch
Source: Iowa Department of Transportation, 2025



Roadway Safety

Roadway safety is an important consideration when planning for the future of a transportation system. A safe transportation system can help support the efficient flow of traffic throughout the city.

Outdated or deteriorating infrastructure, high traffic volumes, or unsafe driver behavior are all potential causes of safety issues that can lead to serious injury or death. Transportation planners use crash data to identify areas on the road network where the number of crashes is higher than expected. Once identified, local government may take action to correct the problem.

The West Branch Police Department responds to all calls within city limits, and up to 5 miles out of town for calls on the interstate. Interstate crashes are especially important to consider for the emergency management system, since calls on I-80 has placed a strain on the community’s emergency response resources.

The Iowa Department of Transportation (IA DOT) provides crash data for the state with the Iowa Crash Analysis Tool. Figure 6.3 uses data from IA DOT for crashes between 2014 and 2023. The

severity of crashes is visualized with points, and the color-coded grid illustrates the change in crashes comparing two time periods, 2014-2018 and 2019-2023. Overall, crashes have increased in West Branch between these two time periods, especially on I-80.

Figure 6.4 shows crash types and frequency between 2014 and 2023. Most of the crashes are property damage only, with much fewer causing possible or minor injuries.

Figure 6.4. Trends in Crash Severity in West Branch 2014-2023
Source: Iowa DOT, 2023

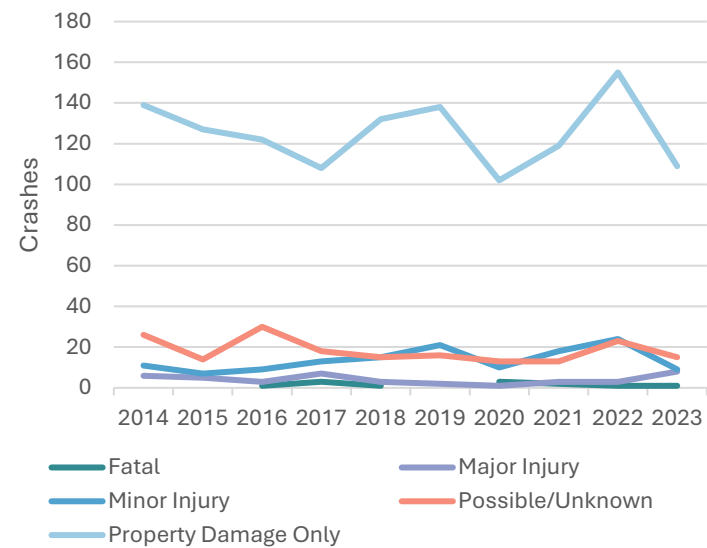
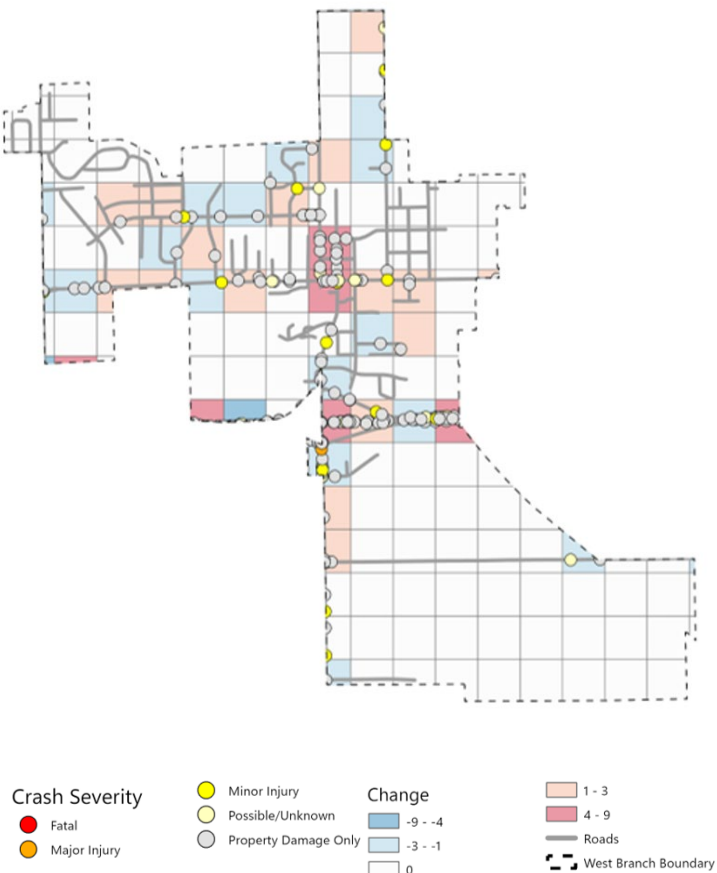


Figure 6.3 Change in Crashes



Considering killed or serious injury (KSI) crashes specifically, there have been several between 2014 and 2023. Two of the crashes were within West Branch’s official boundaries, and most crashes occurred on Interstate-80. Local streets in West Branch did not have any killed or serious injury crashes, and high-speed roads like I-80 pose a greater risk for more serious crashes. West Branch may consider ways to collaborate with RPA 10 and the Iowa Department of Transportation to support measures to reduce KSI crashes to zero, such as participating in safety action plans.

Safe Routes to School

The city of West Branch aims to increase children’s physical activity to benefit their short- and long-term health and improve their ability to learn. In addition to fostering better learning outcomes, biking and walking to school decreases traffic congestion at school drop off and pick up times, encourages exercise and healthy living habits in children, reduces the risk of injury to children through traffic collisions near schools, and helps cut greenhouse gas emissions from vehicle use.

The City and West Branch School District can help facilitate biking and walking behaviors. Most importantly, connected bike and pedestrian paths provide safe routes for students to travel to and from school. Maintaining good trails and sidewalks between the schools and residential areas and ensuring safe pedestrian crossings helps build a healthier and more sustainable transportation system.

They can also promote programs such as Walk and Bike to School Days, as well as “Walking School Bus” and “Bike Train” programs at elementary schools, where parents take turns accompanying a group of children to school on foot or via bicycle. To encourage transportation safety, educational programs can teach students safe walking and bicycling behaviors and educate parents and drivers in the community about the importance of safe driving.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation

Non-motorized transportation is a key component of a multi-modal transportation system. Quality walking and biking facilities can improve quality of life by reducing the number of vehicles on the road, promoting an active lifestyle,

attracting visitors to the area, and providing a low-cost mode of transportation. In recent years, the City of West Branch has worked to integrate bike and pedestrian facilities into its transportation network. According to 2020-2024 ACS Estimates, 0% of the population walks to work, and only 1% used a bicycle. This has changed from the 2010 census results, where 3.2% of the population walked to work, and 0.47% rode a bike. These low numbers reflect the small number of jobs in West Branch, with many commuting to work outside of the city.

Table 6.2 Means of Transportation to Work for West Branch and State of Iowa

	West Branch	State of Iowa
Drove alone	82.5%	76.0%
Carpooled	4.1%	7.8%
Used public transportation	1.0%	0.7%
Walked	0.0%	2.9%
Used bike, motorcycle or other means	1.0%	1.4%
Worked from home	11.4%	11.3%

Table 6.2 shows 2020-2024 ACS estimates of means of transportation to work in West Branch, with comparisons to the state average.

West Branch is above the state average for driving alone to work. They are also below the state average for carpooling. The city should consider making greater efforts to promote the University of Iowa’s vanpool program, since many West Branch residents commute to Iowa City. West Branch has low usage of public transportation due to limited options.

West Branch’s bike and pedestrian facilities fall into two categories, separated and on-street facilities. A separated facility is a bikeway/walkway physically separated from motorized traffic by open space or barrier either in the highway right-of-way or in an independent right-of-way. Separated facilities are suitable for all pedestrians and bicyclists. In an on-street route, bicyclists share space with motorized vehicles. On-street routes can take several forms including bike lanes or shared roadways. In some cases, striping, signing, and pavement markings designate a portion of the roadway for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists. In other

cases, an on-street route signage indicates that the route is safe for bicyclists.

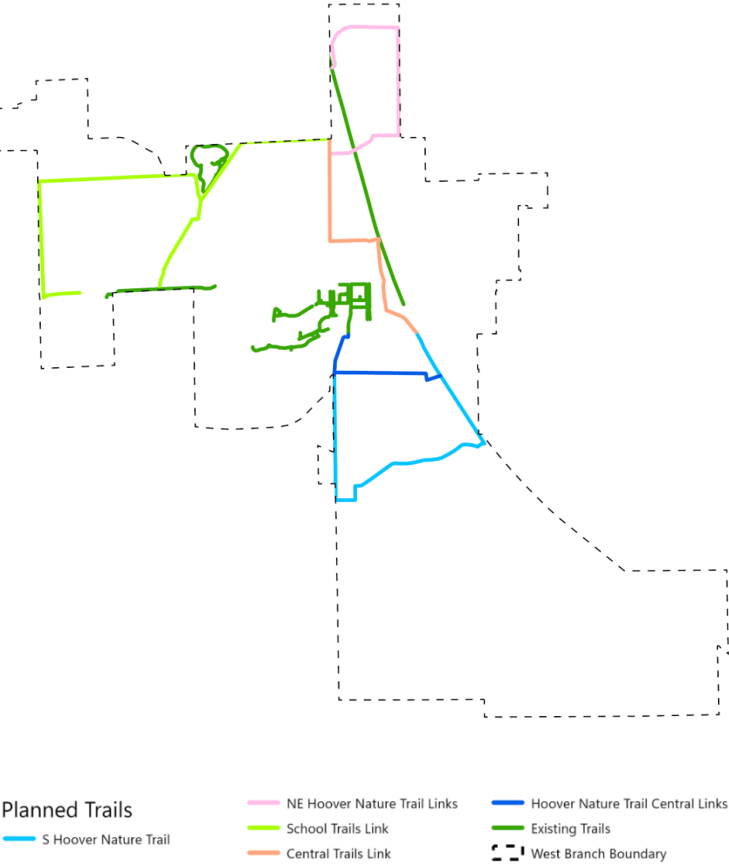
Figure 6.4 displays where sidewalks are available or missing and existing trails within the city. Areas lacking sidewalks include near the West Branch Village manufactured home park and The Meadows subdivision, located on the western side of the city. The industrial park below I-80 also lacks sidewalks, which can be attributed to the character of this area of the city.

West Branch’s system should take into consideration the differing abilities of the potential riders using the system. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) uses the following categories of bicycle users to assist in determining the impact that different facilities and roadway conditions will have on the bicyclist: Group A riders have the most experience and are comfortable riding on most city streets. Group B bicyclists are less experienced and prefer riding on separated trails or low speed low traffic volume streets. Group C bicyclists are children. Children often use bicycles to get to school or recreation but require well-defined separation from motor vehicles.

Figure 6.4 Sidewalk Inventory and Existing Trails



Figure 6.5 West Branch Community Trails showing Existing (green) and Proposed Trail Segments



Trail Development

When designed as a connected system, paved shared-use trails provide safe and equitable access for users of all ages and abilities. This includes design elements such as adequate trail width, accessible slopes, lighting at key intersections, and rest points in higher-use areas. Sustainability can be strengthened through integration of native vegetation buffers, stormwater infiltration practices aligned with Iowa’s Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) approach, and permeable surface materials such as porous asphalt to reduce runoff and improve drainage performance.

Figure 6.5 shows the existing trails in West Branch (dark green) and proposed trail segments. The proposed 2010 trail network connects residential neighborhoods to key destinations across West Branch, including West Branch High School and Middle School, downtown commercial areas, local parks such as Town Hall Park, the Hoover National Historic Site, and regional corridors like the Hoover Nature Trail. These connections create a continuous east–west and north–south mobility framework that supports

walking and bicycling as viable transportation options for daily trips, especially between housing areas, the downtown core, and the Historic Hoover area.

Implementation of the trail network has progressed incrementally due to coordination challenges with existing sidewalk infrastructure, land use constraints, and the need for easements or right-of-way acquisition in some corridors. Prioritization of other parks and recreation investments has also influenced the sequencing of trail development. Despite these constraints, phased implementation supported through programs such as the Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Iowa DOT trail funding continues to provide pathways for completing gaps in the network and strengthening connections to existing and planned community destinations.

The 2028–32 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes projects to expand the trail system and link up to the larger trail network. Regional trails can draw in visitors and provide community and recreation opportunities for residents. The CIP calls for investing in expansions for the Herbert

Hoover Highway Trail and Rail Trail within the CIP implementation timeline.

As development in West Branch continues to extend eastward, one opportunity would be to develop a trail on the east side of town that branches off the Hoover Nature Trail near downtown and bridge the area around North 6th street to the proposed trails near the West Branch Village area. Planning this connection prior to expansion will help prioritize connectivity between residential areas, schools, parks, and commercial destinations.

The cost of developing multi-use trails in urban areas can vary, ranging broadly from \$200,000 to over \$1 million per mile depending on land acquisition, grading, drainage, and materials.

To implement the proposed trail system, West Branch should consider a variety of funding sources. A few funding sources are from Iowa DOT, including the [State Recreational Trails program](#), [Federal Recreational Trails program](#), and the [Transportation Alternative Program](#). Funding is also available through private sources, including [PeopleForBikes](#), for example.

Transportation Options

West Branch is part of a larger regional transportation hub that includes air travel, public transit, and more. Not all facilities are located in West Branch, but may be important for the transportation needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Transit

In Cedar County, River Bend Transit (RBT) provides transit services to persons with disabilities, the elderly, and the public According to RBT’s website, “RBT was Iowa’s first regional consolidated transit system, starting public transit operations in 1978.” In Johnson County, similar transit services are provided by Johnson County SEATS.

While West Branch is not expected to have a sufficiently large population to support conventional bus transit services over the period of this comprehensive plan, five city residents do currently participate in paratransit services through a University of Iowa (UI) vanpool program. There is currently one vanpool to West Branch, departing from West Branch at 7:30am and returning at 4:30 pm. The monthly cost per

rider is \$49 and there is currently a waitlist for this van. Users of this program have decreased, especially since 2020. The City should promoting low-cost and environmentally friendly carpool services offered by employers.

Taxicab and transportation network companies (such as Uber and Lyft) currently provide service to and from nearby communities. A Lyft from West Branch to the Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids costs around \$40-50.

Freight

The efficient movement of goods is one of the keys to effective competition in national and world markets. As a result, policy makers, industry specialists, and transportation planners have recognized that an efficient freight system is fundamental for economic development in cities such as West Branch. This section focuses on the three freight modes: truck, rail, and air. The freight modes are described separately, but the different modes are often used in combination, which is referred to as intermodal freight transport.

Interstate 80 passes through West Branch. This highway provides a ground connection to the rest

of Iowa, the region, and the nation. Air freight service is available through the Cedar Rapids and Moline airports. The rail system that passes through the region may also be a valuable but more limited resource. Iowa Interstate Railroad operates an east-west line that runs approximately 2.5 miles south of West Branch.

Business establishments need attention to freight pick-up and delivery services to be efficient and reliable. Often a city needs to plan for loading and unloading areas and special regulations for truck activity. West Branch should be alert to freight needs and emerging freight transport technologies as it plans, designs and administers its street facilities.

Airport

The Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids provides commercial air transportation services for West Branch. It is 32.1 miles from West Branch, around a 32-minute drive. Flights depart to 17 non-stop destinations with service provided by American, United, Delta, and Allegiant Air. The Airport also features increasing cargo activity with Fed Ex, DHL, and UPS and serves an active general aviation community. The Airport is owned

by the City of Cedar Rapids and operated by the Cedar Rapids Airport Commission. The Airport is located between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City along Interstate 380.

The Quad City International Airport also provides commercial air transportation services for West Branch. The Quad City International Airport is located in Moline, Illinois and currently has four airlines serving 11 nonstop hubs or connecting cities. It is 53.8 miles from West Branch, around a 50-minute drive. Airlines include Allegiant, American, Delta, and United. The airport is owned by Rock Island County and is operated by the Metropolitan Airport Authority. The airport also has cargo activity with Fed Ex, DHL and UPS.

General aviation airports are located in Iowa City, Muscatine, and Tipton.

Intermodal Facility

Railroads, through their connections with other transportation modes, are involved in many intermodal traffic movements. Rail typically provides the long-haul portion of the movement and at an intermodal facility the freight is transferred to another mode for door-to-door delivery. The closest rail facility to the City of

West Branch is located in West Liberty, Iowa. The Iowa Interstate Railroad passes through West Liberty although its intermodal service is currently available only in Council Bluffs and Blue Island, IL.

West Branch Intercity Passenger Transportation

The closest Greyhound station to West Branch is in Iowa City. Three buses leave each day for Chicago with tickets costing \$48 per seat in 2025. Two buses leave each day for Omaha; tickets cost from \$44 to \$62.12.

Jefferson Lines is another carrier providing intercity bus services, with Iowa City being the closest station to West Branch. One bus departs to Chicago daily, with tickets available at \$45. Another bus departs daily to Omaha, with tickets available for \$73.

Burlington Trailways previously provided intercity bus service throughout Iowa, with the closest station to West Branch being the closest station. In September 2025, the agency announced that they would cease their intercity bus service, laying off 79 workers ([Baskins, 2025](#)). All the layoffs were effective October 18, 2025.

Complete Streets

While functional classification may be helpful in describing a city’s roadways, transportation planners and many localities increasingly find an additional concept more useful when describing and implementing the role of their street networks. This concept is termed “complete streets,” which designs streets for all users: drivers, transit, cyclists, and pedestrians.

A policy of promoting complete streets was approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission in 2017. Such a policy requires that design and implementation practices for city streets follow a policy of careful and individualized evaluation of street construction, reconstruction and maintenance procedures. A variety of design manuals are beneficial to reference, including AASHTO’s Green Book, NACTO’s Urban Street Design Guide, and the Iowa Statewide Urban Design Standards (SUDAS).

Figure 6.6 shows an example of a complete street in Winona, MN, a Bicycle Friendly Community, designated by the League of American Bicyclists. This street is designed for vehicles and pedestrians. This example is in line with West

Branch’s complete streets policy and can be used as an example in street design for the city.

Figure 6.6 Complete Streets Example
Source: (MnDOT)



Complete Streets Policy

It is the policy of the City of West Branch to provide safe and comfortable routes for walking, bicycling, and, in the future when practicable, public transportation, to increase the use of these modes of transportation, enable convenient and active travel as part of daily activities, reduce pollution, and meet the needs of all users of the streets, including children, families, older adults, and people with disabilities.

The City will integrate complete streets infrastructure and design features into street design and construction to create safe and inviting environments for all users to walk, bicycle, and use public transportation.

In planning, designing, and constructing complete streets: to the greatest extent practicable West Branch will include infrastructure that promotes a safe means of travel for all users along the right-of-way, such as sidewalks, shared-use paths, bicycle lanes, and paved shoulders.

West Branch will include infrastructure that facilitates safe crossing of the right-of-way, such as accessible curb ramps, crosswalks, refuge islands, and pedestrian signals; such infrastructure must meet the needs of people with different types of disabilities and people of all ages. The City will ensure that sidewalks, crosswalks, and other aspects of the transportation right-of-way are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and meet the needs of people with different types of disabilities, including mobility impairments, vision impairments, hearing impairments, and others.

Future Considerations

Transportation Technology and Electric Vehicles

With an increasing number of electric vehicles in the nation’s vehicle fleet, it is important for West Branch to prepare for this changing infrastructure. There is currently one charging station in West Branch, at Brown’s West Branch Ford. The charging station is operated by Blink and is a 21.6 kW J1772 charger. The city should consider investing in transportation technology to ensure sufficient infrastructure.

The City may also monitor technological advancement around autonomous vehicles, which are being used in U.S. cities and may become more prevalent across the country. In the future, autonomous vehicles may provide mobility services for West Branch residents and could present new planning challenges.

Bike Sharing

One interesting possibility for West Branch’s active transportation system would be a bike-sharing program. Pocahontas, IA currently has a bike share program, where they partner with

Koloni, Inc. The city maintains the bike fleet and Koloni provides the system and software to rent bikes. The cost to Pocahontas is completely covered through advertisement fees through local businesses. To get started, the city was awarded a \$4,000 grant and now sees around 75 monthly riders. Such a program could help expand bicycle usage by city residents but could also be an effective way to bring visitors from the Hoover complex to historic properties and commercial activity in West Branch.

Sidewalk Assessments

West Branch may also want to consider implementing an annual sidewalk condition assessment. This would involve setting criteria for different ranks for sidewalk conditions and assessing the condition once per year to ensure that sidewalks remain in good and accessible condition.

Expansion of pedestrian infrastructure and main roadway improvements should be considered along Greenview Drive North of Greenview Circle and Water Street. Current conditions limit pedestrian connectivity and service distribution equity.

Figure 6.7 Greenview Drive’s Lack of Sidewalks and Road Conditions



Transit

Vernon County, Wisconsin is a rural county in Wisconsin with a population of 31,350 and provides transportation services that could be beneficial in a place like West Branch. One of these is the volunteer driver program, where any resident can request a ride within a 100-mile radius of Viroqua, the county seat, and is charged based on mileage. Another that could be beneficial in West Branch is their Connecting Bus, which connects the bus in Vernon County with the bus in Richland County. River Bend Transit could connect with Johnson County Seats for an easier connection between West Branch and Iowa City or other adjacent areas via transit.

Conclusion

West Branch’s transportation system is essential to how residents move through the community and connect to the surrounding region. While the city benefits from strong regional access, the chapter identifies areas for improvement, including sidewalk conditions, increasing traffic, truck movement through downtown, and limited transportation options beyond driving.

A safe, connected, and efficient transportation system is essential to the West Branch's long-term quality of life and economic vitality. As the community grows and evolves, continued investment in streets, sidewalks, trails, and supporting infrastructure will help ensure that residents, businesses, and visitors can travel safely and conveniently. A balanced transportation network that serves motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and people of all ages and abilities strengthens community resilience and supports everyday life.

Looking ahead, expanding trails and sidewalks, supporting complete streets, improving accessibility, and encouraging alternative

transportation options will help better serve residents of all ages and abilities.

Continued coordination with partners such as RPA 10, ECICOG, and Iowa DOT will also be important in addressing shared challenges and planning for future growth. Prioritizing maintenance of existing infrastructure, enhancing connectivity between neighborhoods and community destinations, and coordinating with regional and state partners will maximize the value of future improvements.

By focusing on these priorities, West Branch can support a transportation system that improves daily mobility, enhances safety, and strengthens the community through 2050. Regular evaluation and periodic updates to these strategies will help ensure the transportation network continues to support the community's vision for the future.



Go more in depth with the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A.



ADA Compliance



Traffic Calming Measures



Connectivity & Risk Communities



Trails: Low-Emission Travel and Community Health



Shared Mobility

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

Goal T1

Implement a transportation system that supports multiple modes and diverse users.

Objective T1.1 Support the implementation of the West Branch Community Trails Plan.

- **Strategy T1.1a** Pursue grant funding from Iowa DOT State Recreational Trails and Federal Recreational Trails programs, or from private sources to support trail infrastructure implementation.
- **Strategy T1.1b** Establish a maintenance program with public works to ensure that trails are maintained year-round, including winter maintenance and debris clearance.
- **Strategy T1.1c** Install wayfinding signage to help trail users navigate the network and locate key destinations.
- **Strategy T1.1d** Add benches, shaded areas, water fountains, green infrastructure, and lighting to create an attractive environment for walking and biking.

Objective T1.2 Strengthen the pedestrian network by improving sidewalk connectivity and quality.

- **Strategy T1.2a** Encourage sidewalk infill projects to expand connectivity within the pedestrian network.
- **Strategy T1.2b** Adopt an assessment program to evaluate the condition of facilities including sidewalks, roads, and trails to ensure that transportation facilities are adequately maintained.

Goal T2

Support sustainable mobility by providing low-emission and environmentally friendly transportation options.

Objective T2.1 Reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the share of trips made by electric vehicles.

- **Strategy T2.1a** Provide information on the city website about EV charging locations.
- **Strategy T2.1b** Support the expansion of EV charging infrastructure as needed.

Objective T2.2 Encourage the use of alternative transportation services to reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips.

- **Strategy T2.2a** Provide information on the city website about the University of Iowa’s employee Van Pool program.
- **Strategy T2.2b** Support the use of River Bend Transit services as an affordable and environmentally friendly transit option.

Objective T2.3 Encourage active transportation through community education and outreach.

- **Strategy T2.3a** Promote walking and bicycling through community outreach.
- **Strategy T2.3b** Partner with the West Branch School District to encourage programs such as Walk and Bike to School Days.

Goal T3

Provide a safe, accessible, and equitable transportation system for all users.

Objective T3.1 Provide transportation infrastructure with traffic calming measures to support safety.

- **Strategy T3.1a** Implement traffic calming measures in all new roadway and sidewalk construction.
- **Strategy T3.1b** Retrofit existing roadways and sidewalks to include traffic calming measures, where appropriate.

Objective T3.2 Use a Complete Streets approach to roadway design that accommodates the needs of all transportation users.

- **Strategy T3.2a** Integrate multimodal infrastructure into future roadway developments to support all users and reduce environmental impacts.
- **Strategy T3.2b** Adopt and implement the Complete Streets policy into city regulations.
- **Strategy T3.2c** Update designated truck route to reduce negative impacts.

Objective T3.3 Support transportation projects that comply with ADA standards to support safe and equitable mobility for users of all ages and abilities.

- **Strategy T3.3a** Identify and upgrade infrastructure that does not comply with ADA accessibility standards.
- **Strategy T3.3b** Incorporate ADA accessibility standards into the design and construction of all new infrastructure.

Goal T4

Collaborate with other jurisdictions to support improvements to transportation planning and infrastructure.

Objective T4.1 Participate actively in regional planning organizations (MPOJC, ECICOG, RPA 10) to support coordinated transportation decision-making.

- **Strategy T4.1a** Encourage West Branch residents to participate in ECICOG committees.
- **Strategy T4.1b** Maintain active participation in RPA 10 planning efforts that improve safety and system efficiency in regional transportation plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPS).

Objective T4.2 Strengthen interjurisdictional coordination to align land use, infrastructure planning, and growth patterns.

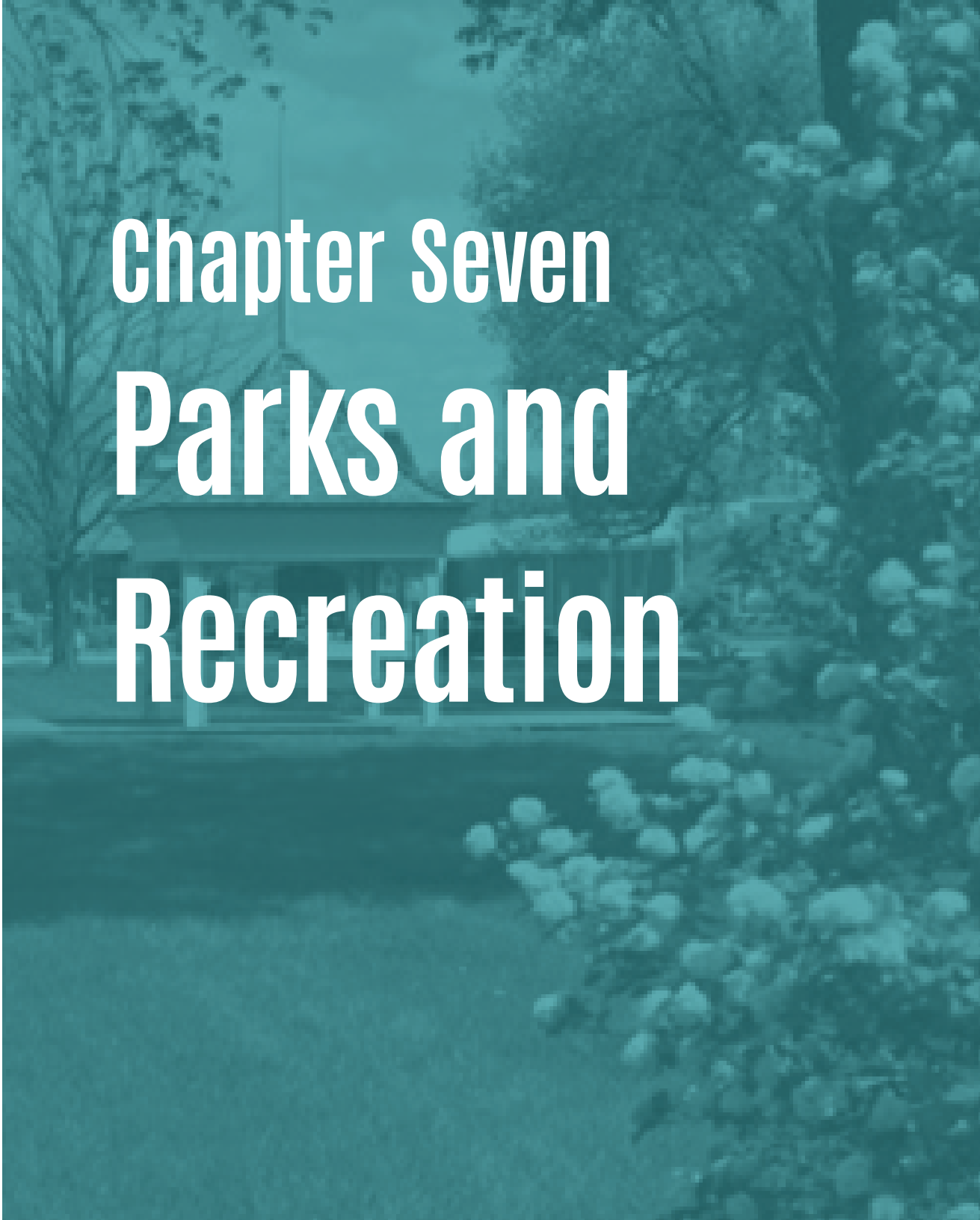
- **Strategy T4.2a** Establish interjurisdictional coordination meetings or working groups.
- **Strategy T4.2b** Align future land use planning with regional transportation corridors.

Objective T4.3 Improve data sharing and technical collaboration among regional partners to support consistent planning and forecasting.

- **Strategy T4.3a** Share GIS datasets and planning models across jurisdictions.
- **Strategy T4.3b** Develop a regional growth scenario to test infrastructure capacity.

Objective T4.4 Coordinate with regional partners to align transportation investments across jurisdictions.

- **Strategy T4.4a** Coordinate trail, transit, and roadway investments with MPOJC and adjacent counties, especially Johnson County
- **Strategy T4.4b** Pursue joint funding and grant opportunities.



Chapter Seven

Parks and Recreation

Parks and Recreation Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

The City of West Branch provides equitable access to parks and recreational opportunities for all residents. Maintaining and enhancing designated green spaces supports community character, recreation, and environmental stewardship. The city fosters inclusiveness through well-designed and accessible recreational spaces and programming, including preserving and protecting natural resources while improving connectivity and equitable access as a priority.

Goals

1. Provide, create, and maintain an adequate supply and variety of park land and recreational facilities to serve the city's current and future population.
2. Improve existing parks, recreation facilities, natural areas, and green space through strategies that reflect user needs, development priorities, and fiscal responsibility.
3. Establish, improve, and maintain a connected trail system that provides recreational and transportation opportunities.
4. Preserve and grow the city's green space and natural diversity.

Introduction

Parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational amenities are essential to West Branch's quality of life and contribute significantly to the community's identity, health, and economic vitality.

From neighborhood parks and athletic facilities to trails, natural areas, and community gathering spaces, the parks and recreation system aims to serve residents of all ages and abilities while enhancing the city's small-town character.

Residents highly value the West Branch's parks and open spaces, demonstrated by the generous investment of time and resources from social organizations like the West Branch Lions Club and community volunteers.

As West Branch continues to grow and evolve, maintaining and expanding a high-quality parks and recreation system will remain an important community priority.

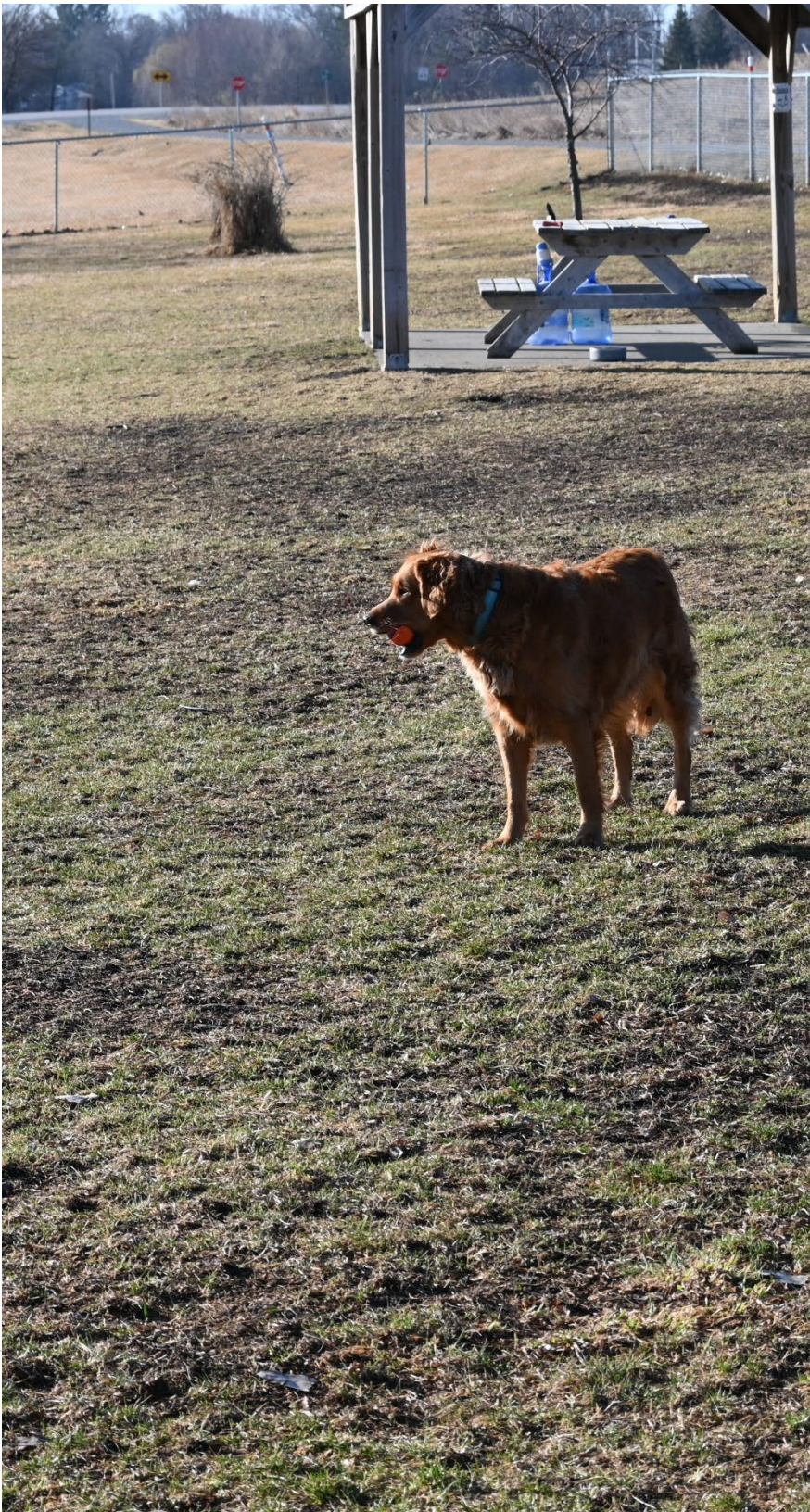
Investments in parks and recreational facilities not only improve residents' health and well-being but also support economic development by

attracting families, businesses, and visitors. Safe, accessible, and well-connected parks and trails strengthen neighborhoods, encourage active transportation, and create opportunities for lifelong recreation.

Planning for future improvements will ensure that recreational amenities continue to meet the changing needs of the community while preserving the natural and cultural assets that define West Branch.

This chapter evaluates West Branch's existing parks and recreation system, identifies current needs and future opportunities, and establishes goals and strategies to guide future investments.

Together, these recommendations seek to create a connected, accessible, and resilient park system that supports residents of all ages while preserving the natural and community assets that make West Branch unique.



Existing Conditions

West Branch has eight parks: Appreciation Park, Beranek Park, Cubby Park, Lions Field, Wapsi Creek Park, Heritage Square, West Branch Dog Park, and Mural Pocket Park. All parks are open from 7am-10pm and provide an assortment of amenities depending on the location.

In addition to the local parks of West Branch, the federally-owned Village Green Park located on the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site provides opportunities for residents and visitors to access open space and natural areas.

Table 7.1 shows the acreage and amenities for City-owned parks and Village Green Park.

Appreciation Park



Appreciation Park is a veteran’s memorial and mini park located in downtown West Branch, dedicated to honoring local and community service members. The park’s centerpiece is a memorial wall inscribed with the names of more than 320 men and women from the West Branch area who served in the U.S. military, including World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The memorial is set within landscaped grounds, creating a peaceful space for reflection and community gatherings.

Beranek Park



Beranek Park is located on the east side of town at 320 Beranek Drive. This park contains a shelter with tables, four sand volleyball courts, horseshoe pitches, a playground, and a basketball court. All park amenities are lit. The park also has ADA accessible bathrooms. The shelter and volleyball courts can be rented out for a nominal fee.

Cubby Park



Cubby Park is located on the north side of town at 301 Scott Drive.

Cubby Park is West Branch’s largest park, containing over 19 acres, along with three baseball/softball fields, concessions, restrooms, a playground, a walking trail that is ½ mile, a pickleball court, and a batting cage. All facilities are designed to be ADA accessible. Fields can be rented out, and prices vary depending on the usage.

Lions Field



Lions Field is located on the west side of town at 221 Pederson Street. The park is 3.4 acres and has soccer fields, shelter, ADA accessible restrooms, and a picnic table. The field can be rented out for a nominal fee.

Wapsi Creek Park



Wapsi Creek Park is located at 201 N. 2nd Street. The park contains a playground, corn hole, and picnic tables. The park also has parking for those who wish to use the Hoover Trail, due to the park’s close proximity to the start of the trail. The park can only be rented out with a special event permit.

Heritage Square



Heritage Square is a mini park located in the middle of historic downtown, found at the intersection of Main and North Downey Street. The park connects to the Herbert Hoover National Park and Museum. The park hosts a variety of city events such as the farmers market or festivals. The park can be rented out with a special event permit.

West Branch Dog Park



West Branch Dog Park is a specialty park located on the north end of town at Baker Avenue. The park is near the Herbert Hoover Nature Trail. It is currently the only dog-friendly park in West Branch. The park contains two shelters and two picnic tables.

Mural Pocket Park



Mural Pocket Park is a mini park located in downtown along Main Street. The park was built in a vacant lot left by a closed Casey’s General Store. It was built in 2022 with the support of the Cedar County Great Places Grant. The park contains a mural and a small patch of green space. The park can be rented out with a special event permit.

Village Green



Village Green Park is a 1.8-acre scenic park located near the heart of historic downtown West Branch, Iowa, and is part of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site on federal land. It offers a peaceful, tree shaded setting ideal for enjoying the outdoors. Its small size and lush greenery create a tranquil atmosphere, with well-maintained pathways and open grassy areas.

Table 7.1 Recreational Park Acreage and Amenities

	Beranek Park	Cubby Park	Lion's Field	Wapsi Creek Park	Heritage Square	Dog Park	Village Green
Acres	4.3	19.5	7.2	2.0	<1.0	1.3	1.8
Baseball/Softball Fields		✓					
Basketball Court	✓						
Batting Cage		✓					
Concessions		✓					
Dog Friendly						✓	
Grills	✓		✓				
Multi-Use Trail, Paved	✓	✓					
Multi-Use Trail, Unpaved	✓		✓				
Natural Areas		✓					
Parking		✓	✓	✓			
Pavilions	✓		✓				
Pickleball Courts	✓						
Picnic Areas	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Playground	✓	✓		✓			
Pond		✓					
Restrooms	✓	✓	✓				
Soccer Fields			✓				
Volleyball, Sand	✓						
Other (Horseshoes, etc.)	✓					✓	
Shade Structures		✓					

Governance and Staffing

Oversight of West Branch's parks and recreation system is provided by the Parks and Recreation Commission, which serves in an advisory capacity to the City Council on matters related to parks, recreation, and open space. The Commission consists of seven members appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the City Council. Five members must be residents of the City of West Branch, while the remaining two may reside within the West Branch Community School District.

The Parks and Recreation Commission is responsible for reviewing and recommending policies, ordinances, rules, and budgets related to the City's parks and recreation system. The Commission also advises on park improvements, recreational programming, and long-range planning initiatives, helping to guide the continued development and stewardship of West Branch's parks and recreational amenities.

To promote coordination between the Commission and City administration, the Parks and Recreation Director serves as an ex officio member of the Commission.

Park Facility Improvements

Some parks have received new amenities or updates since 2020. Cubby Park received a new softball/baseball complex, concession stand, batting cage, pickleball court, playground, and walking trail in 2020. In 2020, Beranek Park resurfaced their parking lot, installed shelter railing, re-poured the shelter floor, and completed about 50% of a new cement trail. West Branch Mural Park was built in 2022, built in a vacant lot downtown.

Curing the planning process, members of the Parks and Recreation Commission shared a list of needs and opportunities. Their high priority projects include adding paved segments to the Hoover Trail, addressing concerns about an unsafe pedestrian crossing at the high school and Dawson Drive, and creating a safe route for residents of the manufactured home park to access services and amenities. Medium priorities include upgrades to Beranek Park, addressing the lack of a community center, and concerns about flood risks for Town Hall.

Parks and Flooding

Communities often restrict development within the 100-year floodplain and use flood-prone land for parks and open space purposes. All but one of West Branch's parks have a portion of their land in the floodplain. In the event of a flood, many West Branch's parks and recreational facilities could experience damage and structural issues. West Branch officials should monitor risks to park facilities and, if appropriate, take mitigation measures to minimize the potential for losses.

Urban Tree Canopy

A Tree Board is responsible for studying, investigating, counseling, and developing a “written plan for the care, preservation, trimming, planting, replanting, removal, or disposition of trees and shrubs with the City.” The board is made up of five members, all appointed by the mayor. The City Forester oversees directing, managing, supervising, and controlling the planting, removal, and maintenance and protection of all trees and shrubs in public areas. With advice from the Tree Board, the City Forester formulates a master tree plan .

Best Practices

Park Variety

A successful park system includes a variety of park types that serve residents of all ages, interests, and abilities. Neighborhood parks provide daily recreation close to homes, community parks accommodate larger recreational facilities and events, specialty parks focus on unique activities or destinations, and open spaces preserve natural resources while providing passive recreation opportunities.

Park Land Dedication

As new development occurs, communities should ensure that investments in parks and recreation keep pace with population growth. Park land dedication ordinances and park dedication fees are common tools used by local governments to help provide neighborhood parks and recreational facilities as new residential areas develop.

Requiring developers to dedicate land or contribute fees for future park improvements helps create a more equitable park system by ensuring that all neighborhoods have access to

quality recreational amenities. Park dedication should be coordinated with future land use planning, trail planning, and infrastructure investments so that new parks become integrated into the broader community rather than isolated amenities.

Long-range planning should also consider opportunities to preserve environmentally sensitive land, expand trail corridors, and acquire future park sites before development limits available options.

Recreational Programming

Park systems extend beyond physical facilities by providing recreation programs that foster community health, social connections, and lifelong learning. Communities should offer programming for a variety of ages, interests, and abilities while regularly evaluating participation and community feedback. Partnerships with schools, nonprofit organizations, and community groups can expand programming without significantly increasing municipal costs.

Programs may include youth sports, outdoor recreation, arts and cultural activities, educational workshops, fitness opportunities, seasonal events, and volunteer activities. Providing opportunities for older adults, youth, families, and individuals with disabilities helps ensure that recreation remains accessible and inclusive for the entire community. Regular evaluation of participation trends and community feedback allows programs to evolve as community interests change.

ADA-Friendly Parks

Parks should be designed to provide welcoming and equitable access for all users. Universal design principles, accessible routes, inclusive playgrounds, adaptive recreation opportunities, and ADA-compliant facilities help ensure residents of all ages and abilities can fully participate in community life.

Safety

Safe parks encourage greater use and strengthen community wellbeing. Communities should

incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles by maintaining clear sightlines, adequate lighting, visible entrances, routine maintenance, and opportunities for natural surveillance. Regular inspections and preventative maintenance also help reduce hazards and extend the life of park facilities.

Walkability

A planning rule-of-thumb is that an average resident should be able to walk to a park within 10 minutes, which is about ½ mile. Most West Branch residents live within a 10-minute walk to at least one park entrance. In the northwest corner of West Branch, some residences are located about 10 to 15 minutes from the nearest park entrance.

Ideally, parks should be connected by a safe and continuous network of sidewalks, trails, and bicycle facilities. Walkable park systems improve accessibility, support public health, reduce dependence on automobiles, and strengthen connections between neighborhoods, schools, downtown, and other community destinations.

Natural Resources and Environmental Stewardship

Parks often protect some of a community's most valuable natural resources. Woodlands, streams, floodplains, wetlands, and native vegetation provide ecological benefits while creating opportunities for recreation, education, and scenic enjoyment.

Communities should seek opportunities to preserve mature trees, restore native landscapes, expand urban tree canopy, and protect environmentally sensitive areas through park planning and management. Urban tree canopy provides shade, improves air quality, reduces urban heat, enhances wildlife habitat, and contributes to community character.

Resiliency

Parks can play an important role in community resilience by preserving floodplains, protecting natural drainage systems, and incorporating green infrastructure where appropriate. Multi-functional park spaces can simultaneously provide recreation, improve water quality, reduce flooding, and conserve natural habitats.

Economic Development

A strong park system can support local businesses and enhance community competitiveness. Parks located near downtown or commercial districts can increase foot traffic, support community events, attract visitors, and improve the overall image of the community. Attractive public spaces also help recruit and retain residents and employers by contributing to quality of life.

Social Connections

One of the greatest benefits of parks is their ability to bring people together. Parks should include spaces that encourage interaction among neighbors through picnic shelters, community gardens, plazas, playgrounds, seating areas, and informal gathering spaces. Designing parks to foster social interaction helps strengthen community identity, reduce social isolation, and build civic pride. A strong park system can accommodate festivals, holiday celebrations, outdoor performances, food trucks, public art, civic ceremonies, and informal social gatherings.

Future Considerations

Parks and recreation are fundamental to West Branch's quality of life, providing spaces that support health, wellness, community connection, and environmental stewardship. As West Branch continues to grow, investment in parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational programming will help ensure the community remains vibrant and welcoming for residents of all ages.

Continued residential growth in the northwest portion of the community presents an opportunity to establish a new neighborhood park that ensures all residents have convenient access to recreational amenities.

To ensure equitable park access, the City should monitor sidewalk connections, sidewalk quality, and safe pedestrian crossings at roadways.

Top priority projects that the City hopes to implement soon are a pickleball and multi-use court, bike repair and air stations, and more programming for all demographics. Looking ahead, longer-term priorities pending funding capacity include the expansion of the trail network, construction of a pedestrian bridge

connecting Cubby Park and the Gilbert neighborhood, and creation of an outdoor amphitheater to support community events and programming.

During the planning process, many residents expressed a desire for a recreation center. The high cost is a significant challenge, particularly with more urgent infrastructure needs. The recreation center was discussed in the most recent Capital Improvement Planning process, but is not included in the 5-year plan. A recreation center would require a robust public and private funding strategy to secure necessary funding to design, construct, and maintain the center. Some peer communities, such as Lone Tree, have recreation centers that could inform similar efforts in West Branch.

Finally, the City should continue exploring opportunities to maintain a greenway along the floodplain. A connected greenway would preserve natural resources, improve flood resilience, expand trail connections, and provide additional recreational opportunities while reinforcing the ecological health of the surrounding landscape,



Go more in depth with the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A.



Combatting Obesity



Tree Canopy



Community Garden



**Peer Communities:
Bellevue, Durant, Lone
Tree, North Liberty**



**Case Study: Lone Tree
Wellness Center**



**Case Study: North
Liberty's Centennial
Park**

Goal PR1 Provide, create, and maintain an adequate supply and variety of park land and recreational facilities to serve the city’s current and future population.	Objective PR1.1 As the city grows, strive for optimal park to people ratio of 10.2 acres per 1,000 residents, to ensure accessibility and walkability to a park for all residents. • Strategy PR1.1a Promote conservation subdivisions and cluster zoning in land use designations. • Strategy PR1.1b Identify areas that exist outside the recommended walkability or service range of current parks and develop a plan to provide park access. • Strategy PR1.1c Develop and implement a Parkland Dedication Ordinance for new subdivisions. Adhere to proper park land dedication and classification best practices to ensure that, as more properties are developed and city boundaries are expanded, new residents will be in walkable range of a park.
	Objective PR1.2 Maintain a Master Parks Plan with actionable goals and timelines. • Strategy PR1.2a Update the Master Parks Plan regularly so that it accurately reflects the current state and provisions of parks and recreation within the city and that the goals align with the vision for the city. • Strategy PR1.2b Incorporate a Community Open Space and Recreation Plan into the Master Parks Plan. • Strategy PR1.2c Consider the park infrastructure needs and opportunities during the Capital Improvement Planning process.
	Objective PR1.3 Develop recreational facilities that best meet the needs of citizens. • Strategy PR1.3a Require future park developments, recreational buildings, and programming to meet accessibility standards and consider accessibility needs. • Strategy PR1.3b Explore funding options for the development of recreational facility projects the community wishes to pursue, such as a splash pad or recreation center. • Strategy PR1.3c Track and/or calculate parks and recreation statistics, such as park and recreational facility capacity, usage, attendance, and other necessary measurements.

Goal PR2

Improve existing parks, recreation facilities, natural areas, and green space through strategies that reflect user needs, development priorities, and fiscal responsibility.

Objective PR2.1 Provide a wide variety of program opportunities to engage different groups in the community.

- **Strategy PR2.1a** Provide programs of interest to different age groups and/or are inclusive for all ages.
- **Strategy PR2.1b** Ensure programs are ADA accessible and provide program opportunities for all ability levels.
- **Strategy PR2.1c** Build partnerships and develop a volunteer base with community members and organizations to support parks and recreation activities.

Objective PR2.2 Implement recreational opportunities that will increase visitation and connection between parks and recreational facilities.

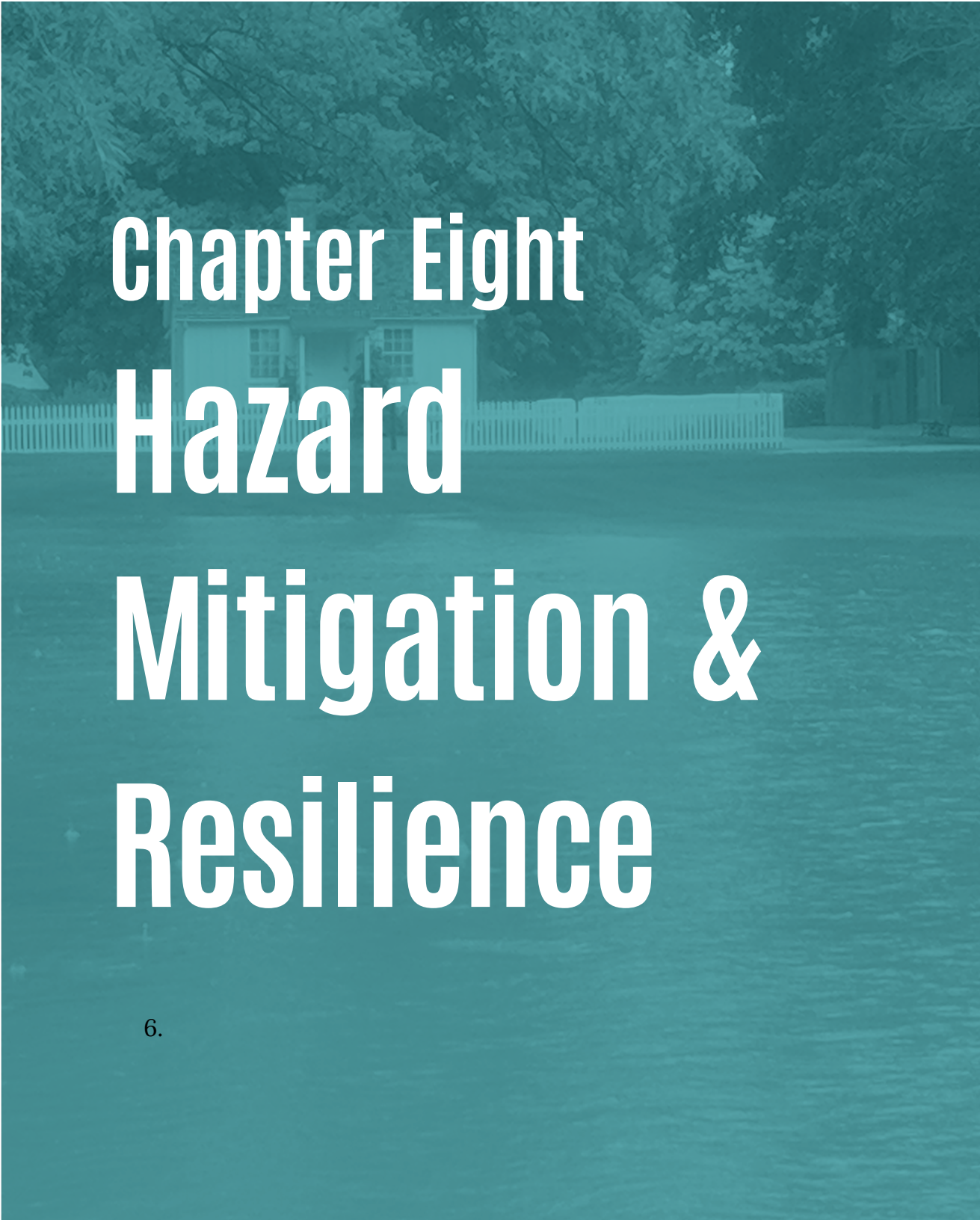
- **Strategy PR2.2a** Provide equipment rentals from city facilities (e.g. bikes, sports equipment).
- **Strategy PR2.2b** Explore partnerships with local volunteer groups or individuals to aid in developing smaller parks and recreational amenities.
- **Strategy PR2.2c** Increase variety of marketing tactics of recreational programming and events to reach a larger audience and to increase accessibility of parks and recreation promotional materials.

Objective PR2.3 Maintain parks and recreational facilities that are safe and well-maintained to reduce risks to patrons.

- **Strategy PR2.3a** Frequently perform risk analyses on all parks and recreational facilities to identify any areas of concern and address areas of weakness that could put patrons at risk.
- **Strategy PR2.3b** Ensure proper signage at all current and future parks and trails.
- **Strategy PR2.3c** Provide adequate lighting along access routes, entry points, and areas that may be used in non-daylight hours. .

Goal PR3 Establish, improve, and maintain a connected trail system that provides recreational and transportation opportunities.	Objective PR3.1 Complete connections of trails to allow for improved access to neighborhoods, parks, facilities, and other important destinations. • Strategy PR3.1a Identify gaps in the trail network and prioritize connections in coordination with landowners, developers, and city infrastructure projects. • Strategy PR3.1b Encourage integration of trail connections into new residential, commercial, and public development projects. • Strategy PR3.1c Promote multi use trails that accommodate walking, biking, and other non-motorized transportation modes. • Strategy PR3.1d Develop and maintain a Master Trails Plan.
	Objective PR3.2 Explore opportunities to expand trail connections to neighboring towns/counties. • Strategy PR3.2a Participate in regional planning initiatives to identify potential trail connections. • Strategy PR3.2b Coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions and regional agencies to create seamless trail networks across city and county boundaries. • Strategy PR3.2c Explore funding opportunities, including grants and partnerships, to support regional trail expansion.
	Objective PR3.3 Promote and maintain safety and accessibility of all trails. • Strategy PR3.3a Improve pedestrian crossings to increase safety. • Strategy PR3.3b Monitor and improve the status and upkeep of trails, particularly after harsh weather conditions.

Goal PR4 Preserve and grow the city’s green space and natural diversity to increase resilience.	Objective PR4.1 Maintain, grow, and diversify the city’s tree canopy. • Strategy PR4.1a Devise, implement, and enforce tree regulations and long-term urban forest management plan. • Strategy PR4.1b Implement and maintain a Public Tree Inventory. • Strategy PR4.1c Seek to become designated as a “Tree City U.S.A.” • Strategy PR4.1d Continuously locate, monitor, and remove unhealthy or hazardous trees.
	Objective PR4.2 Increase and protect the city’s flora and fauna biodiversity. • Strategy PR4.2a Incorporate native plants into park areas and green spaces. • Strategy PR4.2b Restore grasslands along the floodway to bolster flood resiliency and enhance biodiversity. • Strategy PR4.2c Implement greenway systems along floodways and trail connections.
	Objective PR4.3 Develop and implement solutions to lessen damage from future floods, improve park land adaptability, and reduce recuperation time and resources needed for recovery. • Strategy PR4.3a Implement development tactics around existing parks in the floodway to lessen the impact of flooding; such as green streets/parking lots, bioswales, floodable parks, rain gardens, permeable infrastructure, riparian buffers, and other tactics. • Strategy PR4.3b Develop a resiliency plan for parks located within the floodway. • Strategy PR4.3c Restore wetlands in the floodplain.



Chapter Eight

Hazard

Mitigation &

Resilience

6.

Resilience Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

The City of West Branch minimizes risk from natural and human-caused hazards through coordinated planning, resilient infrastructure, and informed land use decisions. The community continues to strengthen emergency preparedness, protect critical facilities, and integrate hazard mitigation into ongoing planning efforts. By maintaining regional partnerships and using data to guide decision-making, West Branch can respond to and recover from hazard events while supporting long-term community stability.

Goals

1. Reduce the risk from natural hazard events through regional cooperation and an all-hazards approach.
2. Improve the quality, availability, and use of data to support mitigation planning, disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience
3. Integrate Hazard Mitigation Planning into Comprehensive Plans and Future Decision-Making Processes.
4. Minimize the risk to life and property from floods, droughts, severe storms, tornadoes, and wildfires.
5. Address and reduce risks associated with human-caused or technological hazards with a proactive approach.

Introduction

Hazard mitigation planning considers the probability of natural and man-made hazards occurring, primarily based on historical occurrences, the exposure to risk in the community. Hazards – such as floods, tornados, severe winter storms, and more – are certain to occur. Mitigation measures lessen the impact and risk exposure.

Hazard mitigation plans are updated every five years, providing up-to-date information that helps communities prepare for and reduce the impact of hazards. The plans also make communities eligible for federal funding to implement mitigation projects that reduce future disaster losses.

In more rural areas, planners and emergency management officials work with multiple communities to create multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigations plans. The City of West Branch and the West Branch Community School District participate in the Cedar County Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, last approved in 2021, in accordance with the

requirements established under 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 201.6. The city also collaborates with nearby jurisdictions through a 28E Agreement – Joint Exercise of Governmental Powers, supporting regional hazard mitigation planning and coordination efforts. The process is currently underway for the 2026 update.

This chapter highlights West Branch specific components of the multi-jurisdictional plan but does not constitute the full plan. For the most detailed and current information, refer to the most recently adopted Cedar County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan.

This chapter highlights public policy that aligns with local, regional, and state planning efforts focused on protecting residents, critical facilities, infrastructure, private property, and the natural environment. It highlights the importance of intergovernmental coordination, public awareness and education, and the integration of hazard mitigation into ongoing planning processes to strengthen long-term community resilience.



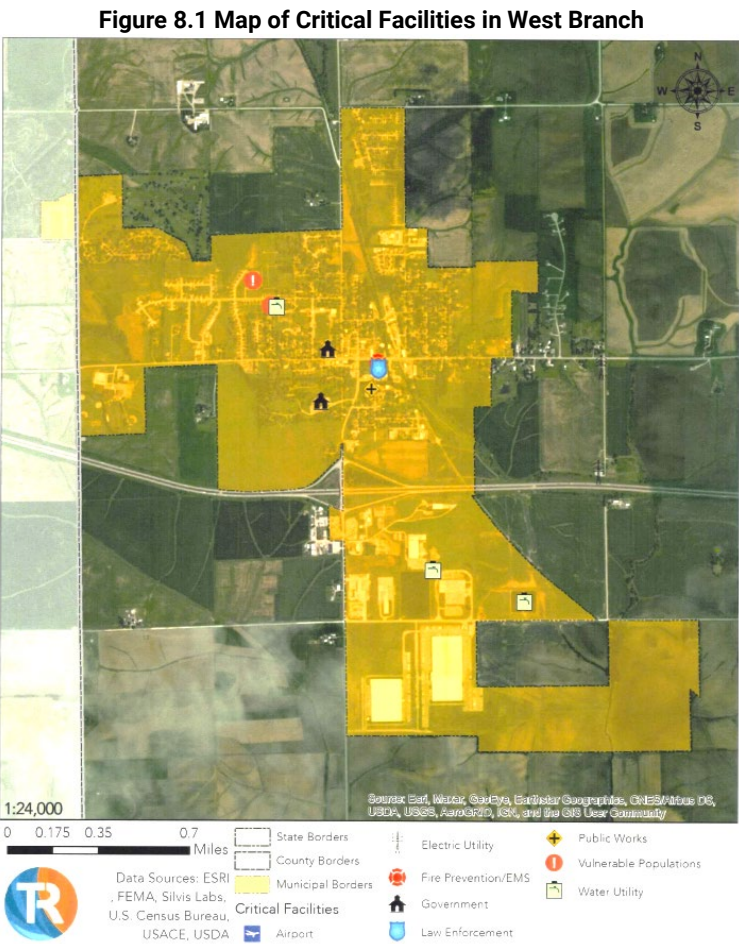
Critical Facilities

The City of West Branch works to protect public property from damage cause by natural and man-made hazards, while also using regulatory and programmatic tools to protect health and property for residents and businesses in the community.

Monitoring and protecting critical public facilities is essential during times of disaster. Table 8.1 shows the list critical facilities within the City of West Branch, which are also shown spatially on Figure 8.1.

These facilities include essential services such as emergency response, government operations, public works, utilities, and services for vulnerable populations. Notably, some critical facilities, including the fire and police department, are currently located with the 100-year floodplain.

Table 8.1 List of Critical Facilities in West Branch	
Name	Type
911 Radio Network Tower	Communications
Cookson Community Center	Vulnerable Populations
Crestview Specialty Care	Vulnerable Populations
Herbert Hoover Presidential Library	Government
West Branch City Office	Government
West Branch Fire Station	Fire Prevention/EMS
West Branch Maintenance Shop	Public Works
West Branch Police Station	Law Enforcement
West Branch Wastewater Treatment Plant	Water Utility
West Branch Water Tower #1	Water Utility
West Branch Water Tower #2	Water Utility



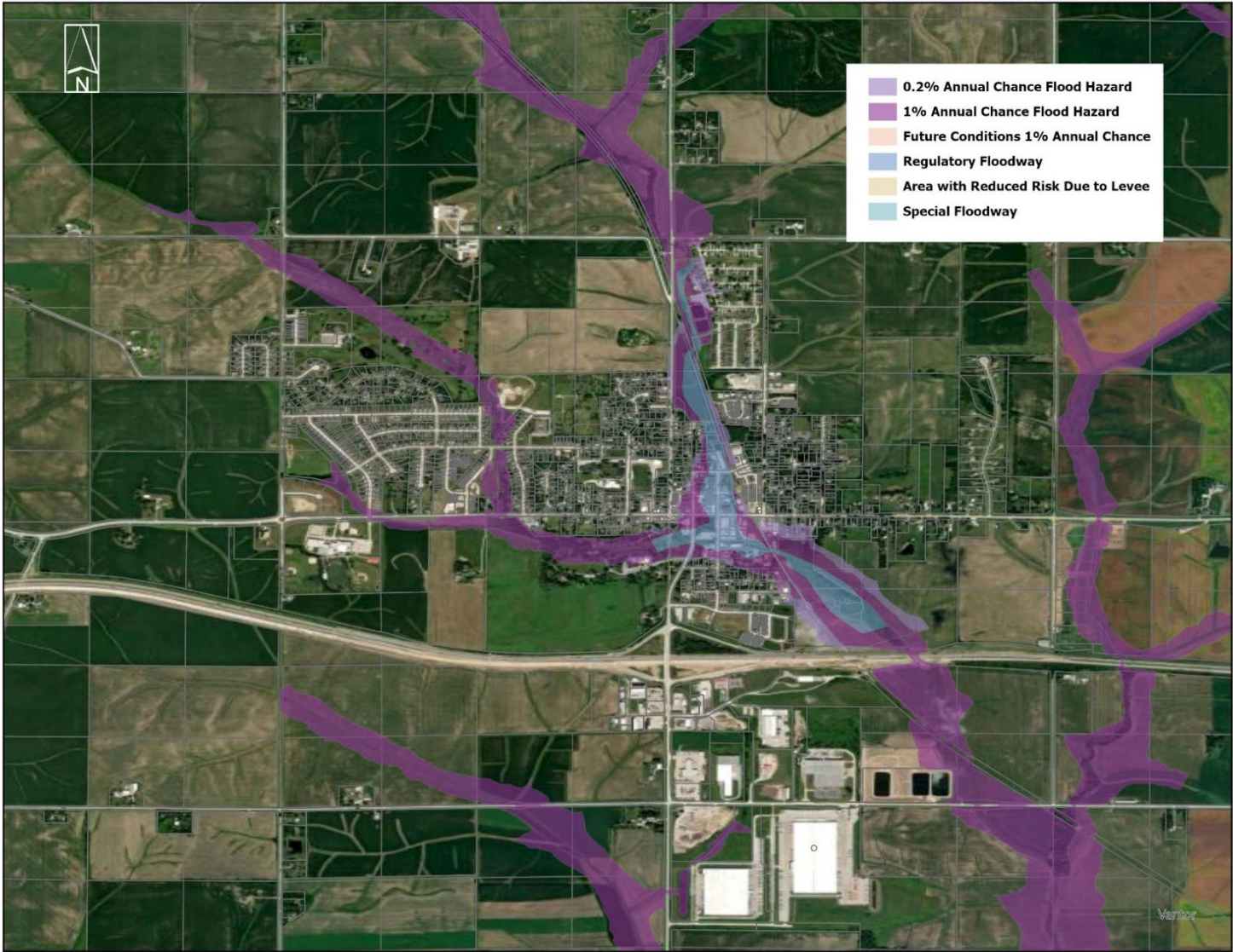
Floodplains

Figure 8.2 shows the extent of the regulatory floodway, 100-year floodplain (1% annual chance) and 500-year floodplain (0.2% annual chance).

The light purple area labeled “0.2% annual chance flood hazard” is the 500-year floodplain. This area has a 0.2% (or 1 in 500) chance of flooding in any given year. Over the course of a 30-year mortgage, the chance of flooding is about 6%. So, while flooding is less likely than in the 100-year floodplain, it is still possible and can cause serious damage. Many communities treat this as a moderate-risk area, and flood insurance is always recommended, regardless of the risk.

The darker purple area labeled the” 1% annual chance floodplain” is known as the 100-year floodplain. This area has a 1% chance of flooding each year. That means there is a 1 in 100 chance each year and, over the course of a 30-year mortgage, there is a 26% chance of flooding. Lenders require flood insurance for buildings in this zone if the property has a federally backed mortgage. This is the primary regulatory floodplain used in planning and development decisions.

Figure 8.2 Map of the FEMA Floodplain



The pink area labeled “Future Conditions 1% Annual Chance” represents the projected 100-year floodplain in the future. It accounts for factors like urban development, increased runoff from impervious surfaces, climate change impacts, and watershed changes. This layer helps planners anticipate where flood risk may expand or recede over time and guides long-term land-use planning.

The area labeled “Regulatory Floodway” is the channel of the river/creek and adjacent land needed to carry floodwater downstream. Because water moves fastest and deepest here, development is highly restricted. Building a floodway can obstruct water flow, raise flood levels, and worsen flooding elsewhere.

Wapsi Creek

A flood-inundation and mitigation modeling study was conducted for the Wapsi Creek watershed to better understand flood risk and evaluate potential improvements. The study analyzed existing conditions and tested several approaches, including upstream detention, improved flow through constrained areas, and a combined approach. Results show that upstream

detention basins reduce flooding most effectively in upstream areas. Improving flow through constrained areas, such as bridges and the railroad embankment, also reduces flooding in more developed parts of the city. The combined approach produced the most consistent reductions in flood elevations across both Wapsi Creek and Hoover Creek.

In 2026, West Branch completed a creek widening project with the goal that the creek will hold more stormwater and significantly reduce the risk of flooding. These efforts have increased channel capacity and reduced some localized flooding.

Additional improvements near East Main Street bridge have not yet been implemented due to funding limitations. Addressing this section could further provide more substantial reductions in flood risk across the system.

Figure 8.3 ream Gauge Monitoring Station on Wapsi Creek



Figure 8.4 Creek Widening Project at the Intersection of Hoover and Wapsi Creeks



Natural Hazard Concerns

Hazard mitigation planning considers the types and frequency of hazards affecting the area. Table 10.2 summarizes the natural hazards identified in the Cedar County Hazard Mitigation Plan based on historical events affecting West Branch.

Table 8.2. Natural Hazard Inclusion

Hazard Type	Disaster History
Drought	1930’s; 1954–1958; late 1980’s
Floods	Recent significant flooding occurred June 2024, October 2018, and July 2014
Severe Winter Storms	The most recent severe winter storm event was a major pile up on I-80 in early December 2025
Thunderstorms & Hail	Notable events include repeated summer storm systems contributing to flooding in July 2014, June 2024, and spring 2026, causing roof and siding damage
Tornado & Windstorms	Most recently, in 2020, West Branch was hit by a derecho, causing major tree and property damage to structures
Wildfires	West Branch fire department responds to small wildfires frequently

Drought

West Branch lies within Drought Region 3, as defined by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for water supply planning and drought response. This region is characterized by reliance on shallow aquifers and surface water sources, which can increase vulnerability during extended dry periods.

Figure 8.5 Drought and Wet Conditions in Cedar County (1895-2025)
Source: National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS)

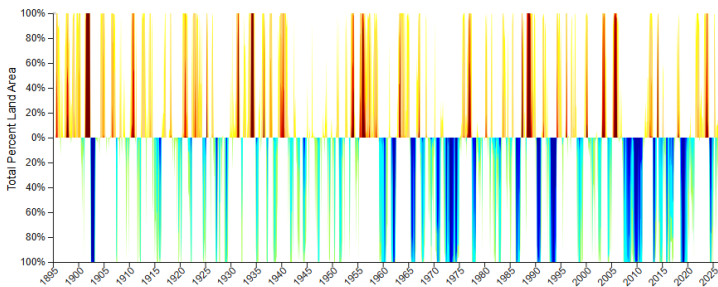


Figure 8.5 displays historical drought conditions in Cedar County from 1895 to 2025 (top portion with red signaling extreme conditions). Significant drought events have occurred periodically, including recent moderate drought in 2024 as well as earlier events in the late 1980s, mid-1970s,

mid-1950s, and 1930s. These patterns indicate that drought is a recurring hazard in the region.

West Branch will continue to rely on the Iowa Drought Plan to support water supply planning and drought preparedness efforts.

Floods

Flooding is one of the most common and costly natural hazards in the United States. Properties located within the 1% annual chance floodplain are required to carry flood insurance if financed through federally backed mortgages. This requirement reflects the increased risk of damage to both property owners and lenders. A structure located within the 100-year floodplain has an approximate 26% chance of experiencing flooding over a 30-year mortgage period, which exceeds the likelihood of many other hazards.

Cedar County’s historical climate record shows significant variability between periods of drought and unusually wet conditions (Figure 8.5). Extended wet periods have contributed to flooding events that impact infrastructure, transportation corridors, and public safety.

In recent years, West Branch and surrounding areas have experienced localized flooding associated with heavy rainfall and flash flooding. These events have affected transportation routes, public facilities, and emergency response operations. Figure 8.6 shows a major flooding event in 2014 and highlights the vulnerability of critical facilities located within the floodplain, including the City’s Fire Department.

Figure 8.6 West Branch Fire Department Flooding, 2014
Photo Source: WHO Radio, iHeartMedia, 2014.



Thunderstorms

Severe thunderstorms are a frequent hazard in the region, often producing heavy rainfall, lightning, and localized flooding. Notable events include repeated summer storm systems

contributing to flooding in July 2014 and June 2024.

Severe Winter Storms

West Branch and the State of Iowa experience severe winter storms that can result in hazardous conditions, infrastructure disruptions, and reduced mobility during winter months. These events can disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including older adults, individuals with limited mobility, and those without reliable access to transportation or heating.

Severe winter storms may also disrupt daily community functions, including school closures, delays in emergency response, and interruptions to essential services. These impacts highlight the importance of emergency preparedness, reliable infrastructure, and community support systems during winter weather events.

Tornadoes and Windstorms

West Branch is located in a region with elevated tornado risk. The surrounding area experiences an average of approximately two tornadoes per year, with over 150 events recorded since 1950. The largest recorded tornado in the area was an

F4 in 1965, resulting in one death and three injuries.

More recently, a tornado occurred near West Branch on March 31, 2023, shown in Figure 8.7. Although classified as an EF-1, the event still caused localized disruption and demonstrates the continued risk of severe wind events in the area.

Figure 8.7 West Branch, Iowa Tornado 2023
Photo source: uwtitanfan, YouTube



Wildfires

Wildfire risk in Cedar County is low but present, primarily involving small-scale grass and brush fires during dry conditions. These incidents are most likely to occur in agricultural areas and unmanaged land, particularly during periods of drought.

Man-made Hazard Concerns

In addition to natural hazards, West Branch is also subject to hazards resulting from human activities and infrastructure-related risks. They can have significant impacts on public safety, emergency response, and the continuity of essential services.

Table 8.3 summarizes the types of human-caused events that have occurred locally or present potential risks to the community. With the exception of major traffic events, particularly on Interstate 80, man-made hazards have historically not been a major concern in West Branch.

Human-caused hazards in West Branch are often associated with transportation systems, utility infrastructure, and increasing reliance on digital systems. Given the community’s proximity to Interstate 80 and its dependence on critical infrastructure, these risks remain an important consideration for hazard mitigation planning.

Table 8.3. Disaster Events Caused by Human Activities

Hazard Type	Disaster History
Traffic Events	On December 13, 2025, human error combined with inclement weather caused a 40-vehicle pileup on the I-80 in the West Branch area.
Utility/Infrastructure failures	Localized power outages and utility disruptions have occurred due to equipment failure and storm-related damage, occasionally affecting residential areas and critical services.
Cybersecurity	While no major cybersecurity incidents have been reported locally, increasing reliance on digital systems presents potential risks to municipal operations and critical infrastructure.
Hazardous Materials Incidents	The presence of Interstate 80 and regional freight movement creates potential risk for hazardous material spills due to traffic accidents, though no major incidents have been recorded locally.
Structure Fires	Structure fires occur periodically due to electrical malfunctions, heating equipment, and human error, representing an ongoing but localized hazard.

Traffic Events

Accidents along Interstate 80 have been a recurring concern within the West Branch area. The most recent major event occurred on December 13, 2025, involving a multi-vehicle pileup of more than 40 vehicles.

The incident resulted in extended roadway closures and placed significant strain on emergency response services. This event highlights the importance of regional coordination and emergency preparedness. Figure 8.8 illustrates this event.

Figure 8.8 Multi-Vehicle Crash on I-80 near West Branch, 2025
Photo Source: Iowa State Patrol



Conclusion

West Branch's long-term resilience depends on thoughtful planning that anticipates potential hazards and reduces risk before disasters occur. While the community cannot prevent all natural and human-caused hazards, it can lessen their impacts through proactive investments, coordinated emergency planning, and informed land use decisions. Integrating hazard mitigation into everyday planning helps protect lives, property, public infrastructure, and the community's overall quality of life.

The hazards that have had the greatest impact in West Branch are flooding, severe storms, drought, and transportation-related incidents. While many of these hazards occur with varying frequency and intensity, their impacts can be significant due to the community's location, infrastructure, and reliance on regional systems such as I-80.

As the community continues to grow, hazard mitigation should remain an important consideration in decisions related to development, infrastructure improvements, transportation, parks, and public facilities.

Preserving flood-prone areas as open space, maintaining and upgrading critical infrastructure, strengthening stormwater management systems, and encouraging resilient building practices can reduce future risks while supporting sustainable growth. Coordination with Cedar County, neighboring jurisdictions, state and federal agencies, and local emergency responders will remain essential to preparing for and responding to future emergencies.

This chapter highlights the importance of understanding both historical hazard patterns and future risks to guide informed planning decisions. Floodplain management, infrastructure resilience, emergency preparedness, and regional coordination all play a critical role in reducing vulnerability and improving response capacity. In addition, emerging risks such as cybersecurity and increasing climate variability reinforce the need for a comprehensive and adaptive approach to hazard mitigation and long-term resilience. By continuing to integrate hazard mitigation into land use planning, infrastructure investments, and community.



Go more in depth with the Sustainable Development Resource Guide in Appendix A.

Flood Management



Flood Insurance & Risk Education

Permeable Paver Systems



Heat Island Mitigation



Backup Energy



Best Management Practices: Bio-retention Cells & Rain Gardens, Filter Strips, Riparian Buffers, Soil Management

Goal HZ1

Reduce the risk from natural hazard events through regional cooperation and an all-hazards approach.

Objective HZ1.1 Coordinate hazard mitigation planning with regional partners according to the Cedar County Hazard Plan.

- **Strategy HZ1.1a** Participate in multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation and climate adaptation planning efforts (e.g., regional watershed councils and county emergency management).
- **Strategy HZ1.1b** Develop and maintain shared emergency resource inventories, including water supply, shelters, and response equipment, to improve disaster coordination.

Objective HZ1.2 Improve local infrastructure and planning practices that reduce hazard risk.

- **Strategy HZ1.2a** Adopt compatible stormwater management and green infrastructure standards to reduce downstream impacts and improve flood resilience.
- **Strategy HZ1.2b** Maintain and periodically update Emergency Operations Plans (EOP) to ensure preparedness for the most probable and high-risk hazard scenarios.

Objective HZ1.3 Coordinate emergency planning with community institutions.

- **Strategy HZ1.3a** Coordinate with the West Branch Community School District to continue compliance with the State of Iowa Department of Education requirements for maintaining school district facilities master plans.
- **Strategy HZ1.3b** Encourage schools and major community facilities to maintain emergency preparedness and shelter plans.

Goal HZ2

Improve the quality, availability, and use of data to support mitigation planning, disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience.

Objective HZ2.1 Pursue funding and education opportunities that improve resilience.

- **Strategy PR2.1a** Pursue regional and federal grant funding opportunities for hazard mitigation, including Community Rating System (CRS) participation and environmental restoration projects.
- **Strategy HZ2.1b** Encourage households to develop personal emergency preparedness plans.

Objective HZ2.2 Improve household-level preparedness.

- **Strategy HZ2.2a** Encourage residents to document household emergency plans and participate in available preparedness programs offered through Cedar County.
- **Strategy HZ2.2b** Promote household access to backup power sources and emergency supplies during disaster events.

Objective HZ2.3 Improve hazard data collection and monitoring.

- **Strategy HZ2.3a** Maintain and update hazard, infrastructure, and environmental datasets to support local planning and emergency responses.

Goal HZ3

Integrate Hazard Mitigation Planning into Comprehensive Plans and Future Decision-Making Processes.

Objective HZ3.1 Strengthen hazard risk assessment.

- **Strategy PR3.1a** Conduct periodic hazard risk assessments according to the Cedar County Hazard Mitigation Plan to identify emerging vulnerabilities.
- **Strategy HZ3.1b** Utilize the social, technical, administrative, political, legal, economic, and environmental (STAPLE+E) method to guide disaster response planning.

Objective HZ3.2 Improve community emergency response capacity.

- **Strategy HZ3.2a** Support participation in SKYWARN storm spotter training and monitoring programs.
- **Strategy HZ3.2b** Form a volunteer community coalition under cooperation of the Iowa Disaster Human Resource Council.

Objective HZ3.3 Strengthen weather preparedness systems.

- **Strategy HZ3.3a** Pursue National Weather Service StormReady accreditation.
- **Strategy HZ3.3b** Expand community education on severe weather preparedness.

Goal HZ4

Minimize the risk to life and property from floods, droughts, severe storms, tornadoes, and wildfires.

Objective HZ4.1 Improve flood monitoring and water management.

- **Strategy PR4.1a** Maintain and monitor floodplain management practices.
- **Strategy HZ4.1b** Conduct drainage studies and evaluate the establishment of drainage districts where necessary.

Objective HZ4.2 Maintain compliance with federal flood programs.

- **Strategy HZ4.2a** Maintain compliance and good standing with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
- **Strategy HZ4.2b** Strengthen enforcement of local floodplains and hazard-related regulations.

Objective HZ4.3 Reduce physical hazard risks through infrastructure improvements.

- **Strategy HZ4.3a** Complete current and implement new streambank stabilization and creek widening projects where appropriate.
- **Strategy HZ4.3b** Incorporate flood mitigation considerations into infrastructure planning and capital improvement projects as they arise.

Goal HZ5

Address and reduce risks associated with human-caused or technological hazards with a proactive approach.

Objective HZ5.1 Improve emergency response capacity for transportation and technological incidents.

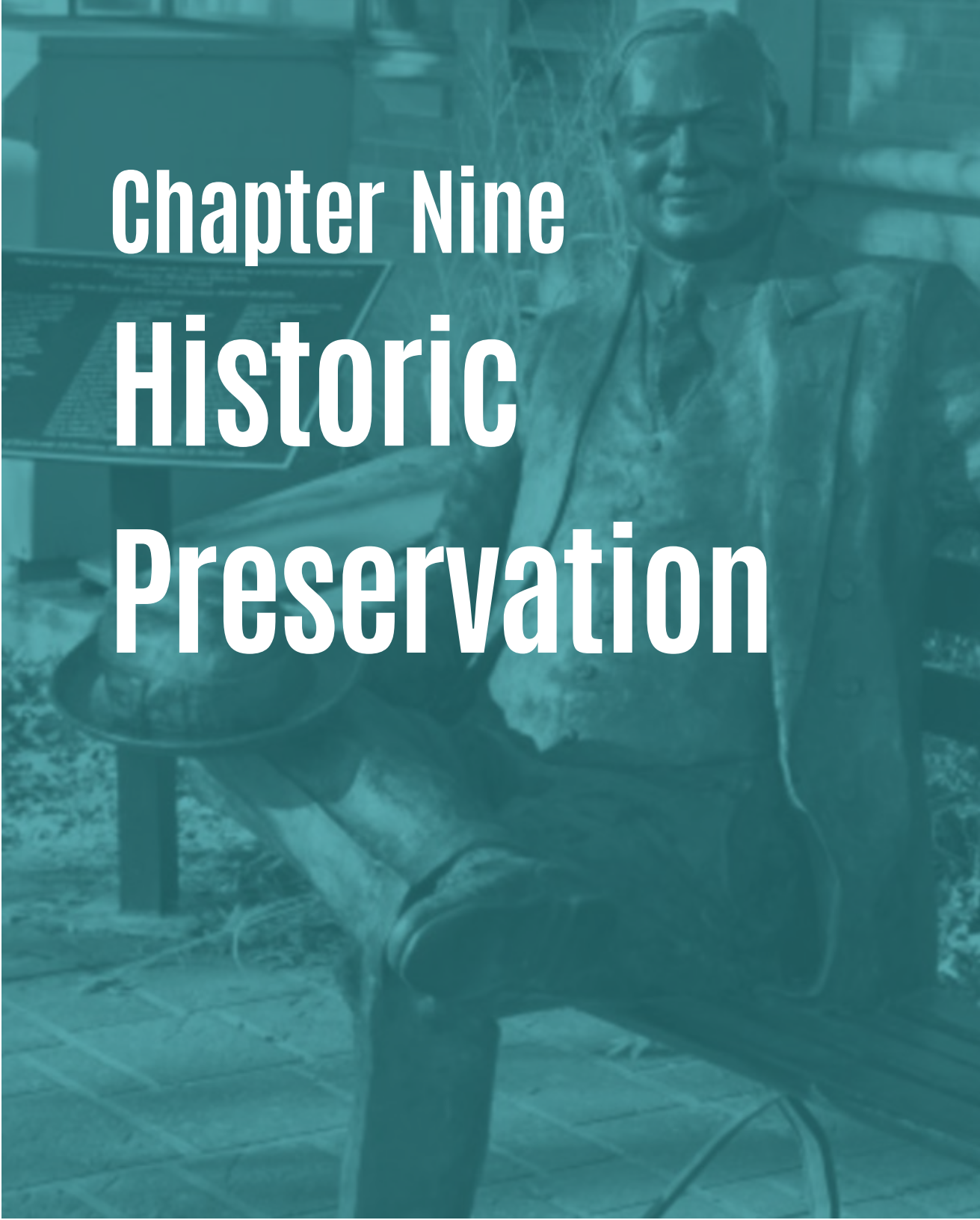
- **Strategy PR5.1a** Improve emergency response coordination for incidents along Interstate-80 and other major transportation corridors.
- **Strategy HZ5.1b** Strengthen local preparedness for cybersecurity threats affecting municipal systems and infrastructure.

Objective HZ5.2 Improve infrastructure resilience and communication systems.

- **Strategy HZ5.2a** Coordinate with regional agencies to maintain and update pipeline emergency response plans.
- **Strategy HZ5.2b** Maintain and improve emergency communication infrastructure, including the radio network tower.

Objective HZ5.3 Protect critical water infrastructure.

- **Strategy HZ5.3a** Incorporate water storage infrastructure and irrigation systems into hazard mitigation and emergency response planning.
- **Strategy HZ5.3b** Identify and pursue funding opportunities to modernize water and wastewater treatment infrastructure and improve long-term system resilience.



Chapter Nine

Historic

Preservation

Historic Preservation Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

The City of West Branch preserves its historic resources as a foundation of community identity and economic activity, including its connection to the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. Through coordinated planning, education, and investment, the community protects historic assets, prioritizes access to cultural resources, and supports their continued use. Historic preservation is integrated into land use decisions, downtown development, and partnerships with local and regional institutions.

Goals

1. Identify, protect, and preserve the integrity of West Branch's historic assets
2. Increase public education and awareness of West Branch's history and historic resources
3. Promote West Branch's history to sustain and strengthen economic vitality

Introduction

During the 2025-26 academic year, the City of West Branch worked with the University of Iowa’s Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC) to update the West Branch Historic Preservation Plan. This chapter highlights key information from that document.

West Branch's history is deeply woven into the identity of the community and remains one of its greatest assets. From its origins as a small settlement to its connection with President Herbert Hoover, the city has preserved a remarkable collection of historic buildings and cultural resources that distinguish it from many communities of similar size.

The city's historic resources extend beyond individual landmarks to include its traditional downtown, established neighborhoods, civic buildings, and nationally significant historic sites. The presence of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site and the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum attracts visitors from across the country, creating opportunities for heritage tourism and supporting local businesses. At the same time, many of West Branch's historic

buildings continue to serve everyday community needs, demonstrating how preservation and continued use can work together to strengthen the local economy and maintain the city's distinctive character.

Historic preservation is the identification, evaluation, and protection of significant historic resources. Historic preservation supports environmental stewardship by encouraging the continued use of existing buildings and infrastructure. It strengthens community identity, fosters public appreciation of local heritage, and contributes to economic vitality through tourism, downtown investment, and the rehabilitation of historic structures.

The city’s historic assets, including its downtown, residential neighborhoods, and its connection to the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, reflect the community’s development and cultural significance. Preservation efforts not only protect these resources but to support broader planning goals related to economic development, land use, and community character.

Figure 9.1 Location of Historic District Boundaries – Downtown District and Travelers Rest Inn



Existing Conditions

In 2026, the City of West Branch updated its Historic Preservation Plan, which provides a framework for preserving the community's historic resources. Building upon the city's previous preservation efforts, the updated plan identifies strategies to protect historic buildings and neighborhoods, strengthen partnerships, expand public education and heritage tourism, pursue Certified Local Government (CLG) designation, and better integrate historic preservation into community planning and economic development

West Branch Historic Preservation District

The West Branch Historic Preservation District includes a portion of downtown, as shown in Figure 9.1. and contains several of the city's most significant historic structures.

The district also includes one noncontiguous property, the historic Traveler's Rest Inn. West Branch's historic resources extend beyond the district and include several significant sites that contribute to the community's identity.

Historic Properties

A 2023 citywide historic resource survey effort led by the Historic Planning Commission (HPC) identified approximately 185 buildings and structures with historic or architectural significance, including residential, commercial, institutional, and civic properties.

These resources collectively contribute to the city's distinctive character and sense of place. Fifteen properties are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, while many additional buildings retain historic integrity and contribute to the character of established neighborhoods and downtown.

The Herbert Hoover National Historic Site is a nationally significant historical and cultural resource located adjacent to downtown West Branch. Together, these historic assets provide an important foundation for preservation, heritage tourism, and community revitalization.

Preservation & Design Policies

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) serves as the primary local body responsible for guiding preservation efforts, reviewing projects, and supporting policy implementation with guidance and support by City staff. These efforts are complemented by partnerships with organizations such as Main Street West Branch, the Hoover Presidential Foundation, and the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, and other local and regional stakeholders. West Branch participates in the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) of Iowa Certified Local Government program, which provides access to technical assistance, training, and exclusive funding opportunities.

West Branch utilizes Main Street Iowa's Guidelines Principles for Design and the HPC utilizes these principles to guide its decision-making. Further design guidelines can be found in the City of West Branch Book of Code Chapter 29, Historic Preservation District Boundaries and Regulations.

Key Recommendations

The following goals and strategies are drawn from the 2026 Historic Preservation Plan.

Goal 1 – Identify, Protect, and Preserve the Integrity of West Branch’s Historic Assets

West Branch's historic resources form the foundation of the community's identity and sense of place. Protecting these assets requires a proactive approach that combines policy, documentation, sustainable funding, and ongoing capacity building. This goal establishes the framework for identifying and safeguarding the full range of the community's historic character — from nationally recognized landmarks to locally significant properties.

Strategy 1.1 – Identify and Protect West Branch's Historically Significant Properties

Identify appropriate mechanisms to protect historically significant properties, utilizing information gathered in the 2023 property survey as a starting point for further investigation. For properties that meet the criteria, actively pursue listing in the National Register of Historic Places to unlock federal protections and funding

eligibility. For properties that do not meet National Register criteria but contribute meaningfully to West Branch's historic character and cultural heritage, establish a local landmark designation program to ensure they receive appropriate recognition and protection.

Strategy 1.2 – Pursue Funding to Support Preservation and Revitalization Efforts

Identify, pursue, and leverage federal, state, and private funding opportunities to support the preservation, rehabilitation, and revitalization of West Branch's historic resources.

Strategy 1.3 – Build Preservation Capacity Among Commission Members and City Staff

Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities to Historic Preservation Commission members and a designated city staff liaison to strengthen technical skills, expand knowledge of preservation standards, and improve the community's ability to administer an effective local preservation program.

Goal 2 – Increase Public Education and Awareness of West Branch's History and Historic Resources

The public’s understanding and appreciation of local history are essential to sustaining West Branch’s historic resources and long-term preservation efforts. This goal focuses on expanding educational programming, improving access to historical information and documentation, cultivating meaningful institutional partnerships, and developing the next generation of preservation advocates in West Branch.

Strategy 2.1 – Develop and Expand Historic Preservation Educational Programming

Partner with local institutions to create and promote a range of educational opportunities that highlight West Branch's history and the importance of historic preservation for diverse audiences, including residents, students, business owners, and visitors. Programming may include workshops, field trips for students, walking tours, interpretive signage, and community events designed to deepen public appreciation for the community's historic character. Connecting

young people to the community's unique history fosters early appreciation for preservation and builds long-term civic investment in West Branch's historic character.

Strategy 2.2 – Improve Public Access to Historic Preservation Information and Documentation

Update and maintain a dedicated section of the City of West Branch website featuring historic surveys, designation information, preservation guidelines, and community history resources. Improving the visibility and accessibility of this information ensures that residents, property owners, researchers, and visitors can easily find and use preservation-related materials.

Strategy 2.3 – Archive Historic Preservation Materials and Community History Records

Work with the West Branch Public Library, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, and the West Branch Heritage Foundation to archive and preserve historic materials, oral histories, photographs, and documentation of West Branch's historic resources.

Strategy 2.4 – Develop Local Internship and Volunteer Opportunities in Historic Preservation

Create structured internship and volunteer opportunities in partnership with local institutions including the University of Iowa to engage students and young professionals in hands-on historic preservation work.

Goal 3: Promote West Branch's History to Sustain and Strengthen Economic Vitality

West Branch's historic character is not only a source of community pride can be a meaningful driver of economic activity. Heritage tourism, a thriving historic district, and a well-connected downtown attract visitors, support local businesses, and encourage reinvestment in the community. This goal focuses on leveraging West Branch's historic assets strategically to strengthen the local economy, expand the boundaries of historic recognition, and create a more visible and welcoming experience.

Strategy 3.1 – Explore Opportunities to Update West Branch's Historic Preservation District.

Work with city staff to identify and assess adjacent properties for potential inclusion in the

Historic Preservation District. Determine recommended boundary updates to ensure the district accurately reflects the community's historic character and provides meaningful protection for significant properties.

Strategy 3.2 – Implement a Wayfinding Plan to Connect the Hoover Historic Site and West Branch's Historic Preservation District.

Develop and implement cohesive wayfinding that connects historic assets and important landmarks. Utilize wayfinding to increase foot traffic in the historic Main Street district and encourage visitors and residents to explore and engage historical assets throughout West Branch.

Strategy 3.3 – Collaborate with Local Partners to Promote the Historic Preservation District.

Build and sustain active partnerships with the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, the National Park Service, and Main Street West Branch to jointly promote West Branch's Historic Preservation District as a heritage tourism destination.

Conclusion

Historic preservation is most effective when it is integrated into the community's broader planning and development efforts rather than treated as a standalone initiative.

West Branch community leaders and residents recognized that local historic buildings, sites, and stories are valuable community assets that contribute to economic development, tourism, sustainability, housing, education, and overall quality of life. Preservation planning should continue to balance protection of significant historic resources with opportunities for appropriate growth, ensuring that new development complements the community's established character while allowing it to evolve over time.

Local design standards and preservation policies emphasize maintaining historic character, prioritizing rehabilitation over replacement, and ensuring compatibility between new and existing development. These standards help guide incremental change while preserving the integrity of historic areas.

West Branch can best guide local historic preservation efforts through collaboration among local governments, property owners, historical organizations, educational institutions, nonprofit groups, and state and federal partners. West Branch hopes to soon receive Certified Local Government (CLG) designation, which opens new opportunities for the community to work with state and federal officials.

Regularly updating historic resource inventories, pursuing appropriate historic designations, and coordinating preservation efforts with land use planning, downtown revitalization, tourism, and economic development initiatives help ensure that preservation remains an active part of community decision-making.

By viewing historic preservation as an investment in the future rather than simply the protection of the past, communities can leverage their historic assets to attract visitors, encourage reinvestment, enhance quality of life, and preserve the distinctive character that makes them unique.



Photo Credit: Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum

Goal HP1 Identify, protect, and preserve the integrity of West Branch's historic assets	• Strategy HP1.1 Identify and protect West Branch's historically significant properties. • Strategy HP1.2 Pursue funding to support preservation and revitalization efforts. • Strategy HP1.3 Build preservation capacity among commission members and City staff.
Goal HP2 Increase public education and awareness of West Branch's history and historic resources	• Strategy HP2.1 Develop and expand historic preservation educational programming. • Strategy HP2.2 Improve public access to historic preservation information and documentation. • Strategy HP2.3 Archive historic preservation materials and community history records. • Strategy HP2.4 Develop local internship and volunteer opportunities in historic preservation.
Goal HP3 Promote West Branch's history to sustain and strengthen economic vitality	• Strategy HP3.1 Explore opportunities to update West Branch's Historic Preservation District. • Strategy HP3.3 Implement a wayfinding plan to connect the Hoover Historic Site and West Branch's Historic Preservation District. • Strategy HP3.3 Collaborate with local partners to promote West Branch's Historic Preservation District.



Appendix A

Sustainable Development Resource Guide



ADA Compliance

Future transportation planning within the city must take into account all requirements set out by the Americans with Disabilities Act so that everyone is afforded equal access to the roads and sidewalks of the city.

All sidewalks within West Branch, whether new additions or preexisting, should be made to adhere to ADA requirements. This means that all sidewalks should be a minimum of 36” wide, and anywhere where the width is less than 60” should have passing spaces every 200 feet. They should be made of hard material that is bound together and made to be slip resistant. Openings and gaps on older sidewalks should be remedied as to prevent trip hazards and avoid wheelchairs getting stuck. The slope of sidewalks must not exceed 5%, and curb ramps must be implemented at all street crossings.

Additional ADA requirements and guidance can be found under the [ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#) section of the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division website.



Backup Energy

West Branch’s critical services depend on electricity. During ice storms, wind events, and severe summer weather, even short outages can disrupt police and fire operations, public safety communications, and water or wastewater treatment.

In response to this same type of problem, Iowa City has moved beyond simple standby generators and invested in solar arrays with battery storage at several community facilities so that those buildings can continue operating independently during power disruptions. Those systems reduce reliance on the electrical grid, lower long-term energy costs, and provide reliable backup when the power goes out.



Bio-retention Cells/Rain Gardens

Bio-retention Cells/Rain gardens are shallow, landscaped stormwater basins that utilize engineered soils and vegetation to capture and treat stormwater runoff. Runoff may be returned to the conveyance/storm sewer system or allowed to partially or fully infiltrate into the soil.

The Iowa Stormwater Management Manual indicates that bioretention practices, such as raingardens, significantly improve stormwater quality. Residential properties throughout West Branch have grown elegant and sophisticated rain gardens, enhancing neighborhood quality and management objectives. There is opportunity to further develop bio-retention cells and rain gardens along main street's commercial and institutional buildings.



Building Energy Use

A cost-effective strategy for improving energy efficiency in existing municipal buildings is optimizing HVAC system operations through adjusted temperature setpoints. Expanding the allowable temperature range between heating and cooling reduces unnecessary system cycling, lowering overall energy consumption and equipment wear while maintaining acceptable comfort levels. National research indicates that modest adjustments to thermostat setpoints can reduce heating and cooling energy use by 1–3 percent per degree of change, with greater savings achievable when wider temperature ranges are implemented. Increasing the separation between heating and cooling setpoints has been shown to reduce system runtime and improve overall efficiency, particularly in buildings with previously narrow temperature controls.

For municipal facilities, incorporating broader temperature setpoint ranges as part of retrofit and operations strategies offers a low-cost opportunity to reduce energy use and extend HVAC system lifespan. Many building energy guidelines recommend maintaining at least a 5°F difference between heating and cooling setpoints to prevent systems from running unnecessarily and to reduce energy consumption (National Renewable Energy Laboratory). This approach can be applied across public buildings, including administrative offices, schools, and recreation facilities, as part of a broader commitment to energy-efficient building management.



Cadet Residence Model

Cadet residence programs are an emerging recruitment and retention strategy for volunteer and combination fire departments. These programs typically provide reduced-cost housing or station-based accommodation for qualified firefighter cadets in exchange for regular availability, training participation, and emergency response support. For smaller communities, this model can improve overnight and daytime response capacity while offering a low-cost incentive for students, young professionals, or early-career firefighters.

Nearby communities have used this approach to strengthen volunteer fire service capacity. Coralville, for example, offers a residency program for firefighter cadets. Resident firefighters live in one of nine private dorm rooms in Station #1 or Station #2 with minimal charge and serve in the Coralville Fire Department. The primary intent of the program is to increase the resources to meet the growing needs of the fire department.



Childcare

Childcare availability is directly tied to workforce participation. Across Iowa, the average annual cost of full-time infant care exceeds \$10,000 per child, and many communities face shortages of licensed providers.

In Linn County, Early Childhood Iowa initiatives have focused on increasing the number of providers, supporting home based childcare businesses, and expanding care during evenings and weekends to meet workforce needs.

Regional initiatives, including Early Childhood Iowa programs, focus on expanding provider capacity, supporting home-based childcare businesses, and improving access to care during nontraditional hours.

School districts often contribute through preschool programming and partnerships that support early childhood development. In West Branch, the local school district's preschool program plays a role in early childhood access, complementing broader childcare needs within the community.



Combatting Obesity

West Branch's 2010 Trails Plan identified trails and pedestrian connectivity as key strategies to improve public health and reduce obesity among residents. At that time, Iowa faced significant challenges: according to the 2007 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, approximately 37% of adults were overweight and 28% were obese, with only one-in-five adults meeting recommended fruit and vegetable intake and reporting regular leisure-time physical activity (CDC, 2007). Similarly, 11% of Iowa youth in grades 9–12 were classified as obese, and only half met current physical activity guidelines (CDC, 2007). These trends underscored the importance of trails, sidewalks, and parks in promoting routine physical activity and creating opportunities for healthy behaviors.

While statewide initiatives, such as the Healthy Kids Act and community wellness grants, have aimed to improve physical activity and nutrition, more recent data reveal that significant health challenges persist. As of 2023, about 37.8% of Iowa adults are classified as obese (Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, 2023), and nearly 24.1% report no leisure-time physical activity in the past month (Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).



Community Gardens

Community gardens can support neighborhood identity, local food access, and social interaction, particularly in established residential areas. In addition to providing fresh produce, these spaces contribute to food security and create opportunities for community stewardship.

The Iowa City Community Garden Program operates over 10 garden sites with more than 500 plots, with annual rental costs typically under \$20 per plot. The program includes accessible raised beds, water access, and clear plot management guidelines. The Coralville Community Garden Program provides a similar model, offering 10 foot by 20 foot plots for approximately \$20 per year and smaller accessible beds for lower fees.

Both cities manage gardens directly, maintain waiting lists, and provide consistent oversight to encourage long term success. These programs demonstrate that relatively small investments in land, water access, and coordination can support large numbers of residents while improving access to fresh food. Studies from the USDA show that community gardens can increase fruit and vegetable consumption and improve food access, particularly for lower income households. For West Branch, a smaller version of these programs could be implemented. A pilot garden could be located near Beranek Park, the public library, or near the high school, where visibility and access are highest. Starting with 10 to 20 plots would help gauge demand before expanding.

The city may consider providing land, water access, and basic plot layout, while partnering with a local organization, school group, or neighborhood association to assist with coordination and maintenance. Establishing a modest annual fee similar to nearby communities could help offset costs while keeping participation accessible.



Connectivity & Risk Communities

Analysis of demographic and health indicators shows that northern West Branch includes higher concentrations of older adults, children under 18, residents with disabilities, and individuals using asthma-related medications, indicating increased vulnerability to transportation barriers and environmental health risks. These patterns highlight the importance of prioritizing safe, continuous, and accessible sidewalks in areas where residents are more likely to rely on walking and wheeled mobility for daily needs. Improving sidewalk connectivity in these neighborhoods, including the northern mobile home community, which is lacking any safe sidewalks, can support routine physical activity, and improve access to essential destinations. Closing sidewalk gaps and improving crossings in these areas supports both public health and transportation equity. As development continues in the southeastern portion of the city, maintaining strong sidewalk connections to the existing network will be critical. Prioritizing connected, ADA-compliant sidewalks in new growth areas can help prevent future gaps, reduce car dependence, and encourage that expanding neighborhoods remain integrated into the city's active transportation system.



Design Guidelines & Energy Efficiency

A significant portion of West Branch's housing stock is older, with 45% of homes built before 2009. These homes fall notably in neighborhoods near the historic core. Older homes are more likely to have limited insulation, outdated heating and cooling systems, and inefficient windows and doors, which can lead to higher utility costs and ongoing maintenance challenges for residents. At the same time, these conditions present an opportunity, as targeted upgrades can significantly improve energy performance and reduce long-term household expenses.

Programs such as MidAmerican Energy's Home Energy Assessments and Iowa's Weatherization Assistance Program demonstrate how energy audits and weatherization can identify cost-effective improvements, including insulation, air sealing, and HVAC upgrades. Research shows that these types of retrofits can substantially reduce energy use, particularly in older housing stock (U.S. Department of Energy). In new construction, incorporating high-performance building practices, such as improved framing, efficient windows, and strong air sealing, can help avoid long-term inefficiencies and reduce future energy costs.



Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

Electric vehicle (EV) adoption in Iowa continues to rise, with approximately 270 public charging locations and roughly 12,800 registered EVs statewide as of mid-2023 (Iowa DOT). Access to reliable EV charging can support low-emission travel and attract EV-driving visitors who contribute to local economic activity.

In West Branch, planned infrastructure includes Level 3 (DC fast) chargers associated with the new Brown's Ford facility expected to open in mid-2026. Different charger types serve different needs, with Level 2 chargers supporting longer-duration parking and Level 3 chargers accommodating shorter, high-turnover travel demand.

Estimates suggest approximately 25 EVs are currently based in West Branch, indicating that a significant portion of charger use is likely associated with interstate travel along the I-80 corridor. Electric vehicles produce zero tailpipe emissions, reducing local air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional gasoline vehicles. In Iowa, EVs produce approximately 2.2 fewer metric tons of CO₂ emissions per year than a comparable gasoline-powered vehicle (Union of Concerned Scientists). EVs may also provide additional grid benefits, including potential vehicle-to-grid integration and backup power capabilities when paired with appropriate charging systems.

A range of funding and incentive programs support EV infrastructure development at the state and federal level. Utility programs, including those offered by Alliant Energy and other providers, may provide incentives for charging equipment and installation. Federal programs such as the Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Tax Credit can cover a portion of project costs for eligible installations. At the state level, the Iowa DOT has identified the I-80 / Exit 254 location in West Branch for a future DC fast-charging station through the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program, reflecting increased EV travel demand along the corridor.



Expanding Green Spaces

West Branch has a long-standing history of flooding, and climate projections indicate an increased likelihood of more severe and frequent flooding events in the future. In West Branch, 31 homes currently face flood risk, with potentially more in the future as development and weather patterns change.

Environmental conditions further support the need for expanded green space. The City's Stormwater Best Management Practices Report (2015) identifies two primary soil groups: upland soils such as Tama silt loam, Downs silt loam, and Lindley loam, which are generally well drained, and lowland soils such as Ely silty clay loam and Colo-Ely complexes, which are more prone to flooding, especially in areas along major drainage routes. While some upland areas allow for infiltration, the city's relatively flat topography, with elevations ranging only from approximately 726 to 750 feet, limits natural drainage and increases the risk of water accumulation across developed land.

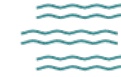
Given these conditions, continued development without sufficient green space can intensify runoff and place additional strain on stormwater infrastructure. Green space functions as natural infrastructure by supporting infiltration, slowing surface runoff, and reducing the volume of water entering storm sewer systems. Studies show that green infrastructure can reduce stormwater runoff volumes by 15 to 80 percent and lower overall lifecycle infrastructure costs by approximately 10 to 30 percent compared to conventional systems. In addition to reducing infrastructure demand, managing water on site can decrease pumping and treatment costs, lower municipal energy use, and reduce the risk of flood-related damage over time. These relationships highlight how the amount and distribution of green space in residential areas influence long-term infrastructure performance, resilience, and neighborhood quality (EPA, 2025).



Filter Strips

As a vegetation practice, filter strips provide biofiltering of stormwater runoff as it is slowed down across the surface of the vegetation. Typically, this practice is used to manage runoff from residential sites, parking areas, and adjacent to paved roadways. It is best to incorporate this practice with other practices to maximize their effectiveness.

Filter strips are used primarily along the shore of Wapsi Creek in downtown areas, as shown in Figure 6.12, where space is limited. There is opportunity to upgrade or support filter strips throughout town with more robust BMPs.



Flood Insurance & Risk Education

Participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) helps reduce financial risk from flooding by making federally backed flood insurance available to homeowners, renters, and businesses in communities that adopt and enforce floodplain management regulations. In addition to expanding insurance access, participation can also influence a community's ability to access certain federal and state mitigation and disaster recovery funding.

Communities such as Coralville provide a strong local example of how flood risk education and insurance outreach can work together. Coralville participates in the NFIP's Community Rating System (CRS), which recognizes proactive floodplain management efforts with discounted insurance premiums. For example, communities with a Class 7 rating receive about a 15 percent reduction in flood insurance costs. The City also provides accessible online resources, including flood maps, FEMA materials, and Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) information, helping residents better understand their risk and coverage options.



Flood Management

The Wapsi Creek widening project aims to improve flood capacity and stormwater conveyance by redirecting approximately 2,155 linear feet of the creek channel and installing about 435 feet of new 18-inch storm sewer. Structural measures including toe wood, stone riffles, and sheet piling will stabilize creek banks and reduce erosion, protecting adjacent land uses and infrastructure. While these engineered improvements are necessary for flood resilience, the project also presents an opportunity to strengthen long-term environmental sustainability through riparian restoration and green infrastructure.

Case studies like the Millrace Dry Pond Retrofit show how flood-control projects may become multipurpose community assets when gray infrastructure and green infrastructure concepts are combined. Wapsi Creek can serve as both a drainage channel and a restored riparian system that enriches public open space, maintains wildlife habitat, and improves water quality by utilizing vegetated buffers, bioengineered banks, and native plantings.

Channel widening projects disturb soils and remove vegetation, leaving exposed areas vulnerable to erosion and sediment runoff. Following guidance from the Iowa DOT River Restoration Toolbox and the Iowa List of Recommended Plants for Urban Native Landscaping, targeted restoration practices can stabilize disturbed areas and improve water quality. Vegetative restoration combines bioengineering techniques such as live staking, live fascines, and erosion control blankets with native plantings adapted to specific creek bank zones. Species selection emphasizes tolerance to periodic flooding and saline conditions associated with urban stormwater, while limiting aggressive spread. This zoned riparian approach strengthens bank stability, filters runoff, enhances habitat, and supports ecological resilience.



Grey Water

Grey water is defined as wastewater that contains few contaminants and thus is easy to treat and reuse. It differs from black water, which contains harmful organic loading and/or pathogens from fecal matter and needs more intensive treatment before it can be cycled back into the system.

Domestic sources of grey water are sources such as sinks, showers/bathtubs, and washing machines. Commercial sources include, but are not limited to, public sinks, drinking fountains, and car washes.

Grey water systems take the wastewater from these sources and reuse them in appliances/utilities that create black water or where the water can't be easily collected and/or treated, such as toilets, irrigation, and cooling towers. This reduces water demand, usage, and pressure on the city's water system and can save thousands of dollars on water bills annually.

This would be beneficial for West Branch to implement in current and future building developments, in both commercial/public buildings such as the public schools or city owned buildings, and promoting the implementation of these systems in future residential builds, especially multifamily complexes.

A similar type of greywater systems that is better for already existing commercial buildings are living machines, which treats both grey and black water on site and then reuses them in nonportable locations. Studies of locations where living machine systems are already in place have shown a decrease in their usage of the city water supply by about 60-75% and have also seen decreased energy costs, thanks to a decreased need for pumping.



Heat Island Mitigation

Consistent with the American Planning Association’s *Sustaining Places* principle of Harmony with Nature, West Branch should reduce heat retention associated with impervious surfaces and expanding development while building on the City’s existing commitment to tree planting and park improvements identified in the 2019 Comprehensive Plan.

Large, paved areas, including school sites, park facilities, and future commercial development along Herbert Hoover Highway, are likely to contribute to localized heat buildup. The city should require street tree planting in new subdivisions and prioritize shade in public spaces, including Beranek Park, Cubby Park, and municipal parking areas such as those near the high school. These actions expand on prior efforts to enhance park facilities and streetscapes while improving environmental performance.



Hybrid Fire Department Staffing

As communities grow and emergency response demands increase, many volunteer fire departments transition toward a hybrid staffing model. A hybrid model combines the strengths of a volunteer roster with targeted full-time or part-time positions to improve daytime coverage, administrative capacity, training consistency, and response reliability. This approach allows communities to expand service capacity incrementally while remaining sensitive to local fiscal constraints.

For West Branch, a phased hybrid staffing model may be appropriate as call volumes continue to rise. The West Branch Fire Department responded to more than 700 calls in 2025, approaching service levels that may place increasing strain on an all-volunteer model. Best practices for this transition include early and consistent communication with volunteer members, shared decision-making around hiring and coverage needs, and careful attention to department culture. Potential implementation steps may include formalizing officer compensation, adding part-time administrative or daytime coverage, expanding training support, and evaluating the long-term need for full-time fire personnel.



Light Pollution & Outdoor Lighting

The 2019 Comprehensive Plan recommended the use of downward facing lighting to reduce glare and protect nighttime environments. Updated lighting standards build on this by emphasizing energy efficiency and reduced light pollution. Modern LED fixtures with a color temperature of 3000 Kelvin or lower provide adequate visibility while minimizing blue light that can disrupt sleep patterns and wildlife. Full cutoff fixtures that direct light downward can reduce wasted light by up to 60 percent and improve visibility by reducing glare. LED conversions also reduce energy use by 30 to 50 percent compared to older lighting systems. For West Branch, applying these standards to downtown streets, trails, and new development would improve safety while maintaining the community's character. Consistent, pedestrian scale lighting can enhance walkability and reduce long term energy and maintenance costs, aligning with sustainability and infrastructure efficiency goals.



Managing Greenfield Development

Greenfield development increases long-term infrastructure and environmental costs, even when it supports short-term growth. Extending roads, water, sewer, and stormwater systems outward requires more infrastructure per household, and national studies show compact development patterns can significantly reduce these costs. An EPA case study found infrastructure costs were 32 to 47 percent lower in more compact development compared to conventional suburban expansion. Ongoing service costs, including road maintenance, emergency response, and utilities, are also higher when development is spread across a larger area.

Outward growth also increases energy use and transportation demand. Development at the edge of communities leads to higher vehicle miles traveled and reduces the viability of walking, biking, and transit. Environmental impacts are equally significant. Undeveloped land provides stormwater absorption, water filtration, and groundwater recharge, while development increases impervious surface coverage and runoff. These changes require additional engineered infrastructure to manage water quality and flooding. Because these costs accumulate over time, the location and pattern of growth directly influence long-term fiscal stability and environmental performance.



Permeable Pavement Systems (PPS)

Trail and sidewalk design can play a role in stormwater management, particularly in areas near waterways and parks. Much of West Branch's existing trail system consists of concrete paths and some crushed limestone surfaces, which are durable and low maintenance but do not allow significant water infiltration. As a result, rainfall is directed into adjacent turf or storm sewer systems, contributing to runoff.

Research from Sustainable Stormwater Treatment in Iowa City: Permeable Pavement and Bio Retention Technologies found that permeable pavement systems can reduce surface runoff by up to 70 percent while also filtering pollutants before they reach local waterways. While fully permeable concrete or asphalt systems can be more expensive, lower cost alternatives such as crushed limestone, permeable pavers, or hybrid trail sections can provide partial infiltration benefits at a more feasible price point. Crushed limestone trails typically range from \$50 to \$100 per linear foot, compared to higher costs for full concrete systems.

PPSs are designed for impervious surfaces such as parking lot infrastructure. Studies have shown that interlocking concrete blocks can reduce stormwater runoff pollutants.

Additionally, Section 2J-1 of the Iowa Stormwater Management Manual indicates that PPS's can have a beneficial impact on cold water streams. There are currently no PPSs in West Branch city limits. Investments in this type of infrastructure supports stormwater goals while also contributing to a unique historic character.



PFAS in Firefighter Gear

Firefighters use specially designed turnout gear and personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect them from the extreme heat when fighting fires. When developing this equipment, Per and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are built into the outer shell layer of the gear to ensure heat and water resistance. This gear protects against heat of over 500 degrees Fahrenheit.

Unfortunately, PFAS starts to leach at 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Exposure to PFAS, through inhalation, dermal absorption, or ingestion, leads to an increased risk of developing cancer. For example, for every 10 ng/mL of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), another form of PFAS, found in the blood, risk of getting kidney cancer increases by 16%.

To reduce this risk, West Branch should consider phasing out existing gear and replacing it with PFAS-free turnout gear and PPE.



Radon Testing

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can enter homes through foundations and accumulate to unsafe levels indoors. Iowa has some of the highest radon levels in the country, with the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services estimating that approximately 70 percent of homes exceed the EPA action level of 4.0 pCi/L. It is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and is a known concern across Iowa due to underlying geology. Testing is the only way to determine whether radon is present at elevated levels in a home. Short-term radon test kits are often available for free or at low cost through state and county public health programs, increasing accessibility for residents. When elevated levels are detected, mitigation systems can significantly reduce indoor radon concentrations, and radon-resistant construction techniques are commonly incorporated into new housing.



Responsible & Strategic Use of TIF

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can support economic development by producing funds for projects by capturing future increases in property tax revenue within a district. This temporarily diverts funds from schools, libraries, and county services. A TIF without a clear goal can lead to limited resources for essential public services while locking the City into long-term financial liabilities (Iowa Department of Revenue).

Neighboring communities such as Iowa City and Coralville have used TIF use as a targeted strategy for redevelopment and infrastructure investment. Shifting TIF usage away from greenfield subsidies emphasizes strategic infill projects over expansive urban sprawl (American Planning Association).

A more sustainable approach to TIF usage includes setting clear targets and a set timeline so that funds are focused on areas with clear economic need rather than as a general development incentive. Additionally, projects should meet a “but-for” standard demonstrating that development would not occur without public participation. This requires transparency and accountability at the forefront of reporting and evaluation of future projects. Public incentives should prioritize site improvements, public infrastructure, and shared community benefits over direct subsidies to private developers, preventing the use of TIF from eroding the tax base for essential services (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy).



Retrofitting Buildings

Retrofitting buildings involves upgrading preexisting buildings so that they can be more energy efficient and sustainable without having to do too many severe infrastructure modifications. This is ideal for West Branch to preserve and maintain the historical aspects and significance of the many city and downtown buildings, while also improving the efficiency and productivity of these buildings and additionally saving the city money on utility costs. According to the [Environmental Protection Agency's Rules of Thumb](#), retrofitting existing buildings can reduce overall energy consumption by approximately 20-30% on average, which can then save about 6-9% off of total annual costs. Energy audits can be conducted to pinpoint the buildings in which retrofits would be the most beneficial and aspects of the building that would benefit the most from retrofits. Some retrofits that would be useful for West Branch installing occupancy sensors for lights, adjusting the zone temperature deadband, replacing windows, adding and/or upgrading wall and roof insulation. For more information on retrofitting existing buildings, including more options that West Branch could implement, the [Advanced Energy Retrofit Guide from the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory](#) has detailed guides for ways all types of buildings can adjust buildings to be more energy efficient.



Riparian Buffers

According to the Iowa Stormwater Management Manual, riparian buffer strips consist of vegetation that grows along the stream. They are typically 25-50 feet wide and consist of unmanaged forests closest to the bank, then managed shrubs, followed by an urban transition zone. These areas may be constructed with engineered materials or with natural vegetation.

Riparian buffers are currently in practice along waterways along Main Street, in residential, agricultural, recreational, and forested areas. Expanding and connecting these areas will improve stormwater management potential, wildlife corridors, and natural beauty.



Shared Mobility

Shared mobility programs are options for those who may not be able to use or have difficulty using traditional modes of transportation or where these modes may not be available to them. These programs provide aid to the elderly and those with disabilities and people who may not have access to a personal vehicle or public transportation. To become more equitable in the transportation sphere, West Branch should seek to create partnerships with shared mobility programs and to promote their availability to general public.

Some examples of pre-existing shared mobility programs in the surrounding area that West Branch may consider partnerships with could be the Johnson County SEATS program, AbbeHealth Aging Services, the United Way of Johnson and Washington Counties 55+ Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Iowa City Transit Paratransit Service, the University of Iowa Employee Van Pool Program, and the Johnson County's Trip Connect program. The University of Iowa Employee Van Pool Program already has one van serving West Branch, but spaces are full and thus West Branch may look into expanding this partnership with the University of Iowa. The other services mentioned all already serve the greater Johnson County area including North Liberty and Coralville, with Trip Connect going out as far as Solon and Swisher and thus may be open to expanding partnerships with West Branch.

It is also imperative that these services are widely promoted and information on them are easily accessible to those in the community who may need them. Promotion of the services should take a variety of forms to encourage that the information is disseminated as far as possible and that all communication barriers are crossed.



Shared Public Safety Facility

Shared public safety facilities are a common strategy for communities seeking to modernize emergency services while reducing long-term facility costs. By co-locating fire, police, emergency management, and related public safety functions, communities can reduce duplicated spaces such as meeting rooms, training areas, storage, locker rooms, parking, and administrative offices. Shared facilities can also improve coordination between departments and support more efficient use of land, staffing, and capital resources.

West Branch's existing fire and police facility is located within a floodway, which limits its long-term suitability for emergency service operations. As the community plans for future growth, relocating public safety functions outside of flood-prone areas should be treated as a priority resilience and service-continuity strategy. Comparable public safety facilities in small and mid-sized Midwestern communities often require sites of approximately three to five acres, depending on apparatus bays, parking, stormwater management, training space, and future expansion needs. Future site evaluation should consider flood risk, response times, access to major corridors, proximity to existing and future residential growth areas, utility availability, and opportunities for phased construction.

Conversations with the Fire Chief in 2026 identified several potential relocation areas, including land north and east of the high school and agricultural land on the northeast side of West Branch. These areas should continue to be evaluated through a formal site-selection process that includes departmental input, parcel-level analysis, cost estimation, and public engagement.



Soil Management

When soils are stripped or heavily compacted during development, their natural ability to absorb and filter water is greatly diminished. This increases stormwater runoff, places greater demand on engineered infrastructure, and contributes to erosion and localized flooding. The Model Iowa Stormwater Management Standards, which serve as the technical basis for many city stormwater ordinances in communities such as Coralville and other parts of eastern Iowa, specifically address soil quality and restoration. The manual recommends preserving and respreading existing topsoil in an uncompacted condition after grading and construction and ensuring that post-construction soils can sustain vegetation and supporting infiltration. It also provides credit in stormwater calculations for practices that restore or enhance soil function, recognizing soil as an integral component of stormwater treatment. These approaches highlight the role of soil management in reducing runoff, improving vegetation health, and supporting long-term stormwater performance. However, recent state-level policy changes may limit the ability of local governments to require certain soil restoration practices, which can affect how these standards are applied in practice.



Solar Opportunities

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the average monthly utility bill in Iowa for electricity and natural gas comes to \$182.63 per month (2024).

As West Branch continues to grow and municipal buildings are remodeled or constructed, there is an opportunity to incorporate solar energy into building design. While homeowners should be made aware of the personal advantages of installing solar, one way to offset electricity costs for the city is the incorporation of solar into municipal electrical system design.

Potential locations could include the high school, city hall, and future facilities such as a police or fire station, recreation building, or a future library location. Solar requires an upfront investment but once installed it can significantly reduce long term electricity costs. Electricity produced by solar panels is essentially free after installation because the energy source is sunlight rather than purchased fuel. Solar photovoltaic systems also typically last 25 to 30 years, allowing cities to generate electricity over decades while reducing reliance on grid energy and stabilizing long term utility costs (U.S. Department of Energy 2023).



Traffic Calming Measures

Traffic calming measures are ways cities can reduce vehicle speeds and promote pedestrian and bicycle safety throughout the community. Promoting pedestrian mobility requires that these spaces are safe and comfortable for pedestrians. This is especially important in areas near schools and along Main Street, one of West Branch’s most central and heavily used corridors. Main Street runs through the heart of downtown while also serving as a direct connection to Herbert Hoover Highway, bringing a mix of traffic ranging from pedestrians and bicycles to passenger vehicles and semi-trucks. This creates potentially dangerous conditions for all who use this corridor. Traffic calming measures can reduce speeds and promote situational awareness in these areas, increasing safety for everyone who uses Main Street, whether by vehicle, foot, or bicycle.

Street design features and techniques should promote safe and comfortable travel by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation riders, such as traffic-calming circles, narrow vehicle lanes, raised medians, road diets, high street connectivity, and physical buffers and separations between vehicular traffic and other users. Pedestrian-oriented signs, pedestrian-scale lighting, benches and other street furniture, and bicycle parking facilities also improve safety and mobility.

There are several traffic calming measures currently used in West Branch, as well as additional strategies commonly applied in similar contexts. Existing measures include traffic circles, on-street parking, curb extensions, and chokers, all of which influence driver behavior and reduce speeds. Other approaches, such as speed humps, chicanes, and lane narrowing, are widely used to improve safety and reduce conflicts between users. More information on traffic calming measures can be found through the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.



Trails: Low-Emission Travel and Community Health

The proposed 2010 trail network connects residential neighborhoods to key destinations across West Branch, including West Branch High School and Middle School, downtown commercial areas, local parks such as Town Hall Park, the Hoover National Historic Site, and regional corridors like the Hoover Nature Trail. These connections create a city-wide mobility framework that supports walking and bicycling as viable transportation options for daily trips, especially between housing areas, the downtown core, and the Historic Hoover area. When designed as a connected system, paved shared-use trails provide safe and equitable access for users of all ages and abilities. This includes design elements such as adequate trail width, accessible slopes, lighting at key intersections, and rest points in higher-use areas. Sustainability can be strengthened through integration of native vegetation buffers, stormwater infiltration practices aligned with Iowa’s Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) approach, and permeable surface materials such as porous asphalt to reduce runoff and improve drainage performance. Implementation of the trail network has progressed incrementally due to coordination challenges with existing sidewalk infrastructure, land use constraints, and the need for easements or right-of-way acquisition in some corridors. Prioritization of other parks and recreation investments has also influenced the sequencing of trail development. Despite these constraints, phased implementation supported through programs such as the Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Iowa DOT trail funding continues to provide pathways for completing gaps in the network and strengthening connections to existing and planned community destinations.



Tree Canopy

A well-maintained tree canopy provides measurable environmental benefits, including shade, reduced urban heat, improved air quality, and stormwater interception. Urban forestry programs increasingly treat canopy coverage as a form of infrastructure, supported through inventories and long-term management strategies. The Iowa City Urban Forestry Program maintains an inventory of more than 30,000 public trees and uses this data to guide maintenance, track canopy change over time, and prioritize replanting efforts. Iowa City also collaborates with the University of Iowa through tools such as i-Tree and ICIGO, which provide GIS-based methods for tree inventory and monitoring that are commonly adapted by other communities.

Emerald ash borer has significantly impacted ash tree populations across eastern Iowa, including in communities such as Coralville and Iowa City. In response, many municipalities have transitioned toward diversified planting strategies to reduce vulnerability to future large-scale canopy loss. Baseline tree inventories are widely used in urban forestry planning to document existing canopy coverage, species distribution, and areas of decline. These inventories support prioritization of maintenance activities, particularly in street corridors, parks, and residential areas with limited shade coverage.

Urban forestry guidance commonly references standards for tree spacing, replacement, and diversity in new development to maintain long-term canopy health. These approaches are used in many comparable communities to manage canopy loss associated with redevelopment and growth.



Walking Distance to Green Space

Consistent with the APA principles of Livable Built Environment and Interwoven Equity, equitable access to parks is often evaluated alongside total park acreage. Early APA guidance on recreational standards used measures such as 1 acre of park or playground space per 100 residents as a baseline planning reference. The City currently meets this benchmark, although the APA notes that such formulas are most effective when adapted to local conditions and changing community needs. A commonly used accessibility metric in park planning is the 10-minute walk standard (approximately 0.5 miles), which focuses on proximity to green space rather than total acreage. Preliminary walking buffer analysis indicates that areas south of Main Street and future growth areas south of Interstate 80 may not meet this threshold as development expands toward the western edge of the city and near the mobile home park.

Park planning in growing communities often incorporates parkland dedication requirements or trail connectivity as part of subdivision design, particularly in new growth areas. In West Branch, existing open space near the high school has been identified in prior planning efforts as a potential connection point within the broader park and trail network. Neighborhood parks in similar communities typically include basic amenities such as playgrounds, seating, and shade trees to support both active and passive recreation.



Youth Spaces & Support

West Branch is a place for families. ACS estimates show over 26 percent of the population is under age 15 and nearly 45 percent is under age 30, indicating a strong need for youth-focused spaces and support systems. Local recreation programs and library activities already play an important role in meeting this need by providing spaces for youth engagement, structured activities, and community interaction.

Nearby communities such as Coralville and Iowa City illustrate how expanded youth programming can support access and long-term outcomes. In Coralville, youth scholarships reduce financial barriers by covering many program costs for income-qualified families, helping ensure that camps, sports, and after-school programs are accessible. The city also offers free drop-in programs for middle school students, creating structured and supervised spaces outside of school hours. In Iowa City, youth programming extends into areas such as career exploration, mentorship, and life skills development. Partnerships with local organizations provide opportunities for paid internships, financial literacy education, and mental health support, connecting youth to resources early and contributing to long-term stability. Across communities, these approaches frame youth spaces as part of a broader system of accessibility and support. Consistent access to structured programming, community partnerships, and low-barrier participation is associated with stronger social connections, improved youth outcomes, and long-term community stability.



Case Study: Jefferson Historic Redevelopment

One notable success story involving IEDA comes from Jefferson, Iowa. In 2026, Jefferson partnered with Main Street Iowa to complete the Centennial Block Redevelopment Project in their historic downtown district. This project restored a Victorian style commercial building constructed in 1876. This building was an updated restaurant space with affordable upper-story housing. This restoration project helped strengthen downtown business activity and attract new investment to the community. In total, the City of Jefferson received \$453,071 in Community Development Block Grant Funds on behalf of Why Not Us, LLC to assist with the \$503,071 project (Greene County News, 2023). West Branch could utilize similar CDBG funding to renovate historic downtown buildings and provide affordable upper-story housing units.



Case Study: Lone Tree Wellness Center

The wellness center built in Lone Tree, Iowa, completed in 2018, demonstrates a small-town finding connections and implementing strategies to build a much-desired recreational facility. The city and the school district partnered to fund the building of the center and the school has taken responsibility of running and managing the center, cutting management costs out of city expenses. A \$2.5 million bond was passed by the city for development and grants were received from Enhance Iowa and Riverside Casino. In addition, the city council contributed \$250,000 to the project. Membership fees to use the facility will help offset the costs put into developing the facility. The total cost of the facility was \$3.4 million, and the company the city partnered with took extra steps to find building strategies and materials to lower costs without compromising durability and longevity, such as designing with a 10-foot-wide module to cut transportation costs in half and also the precast concrete panels used in the facility were sized to enhance efficiency. The architects and construction team behind the development were able to complete the project at 11% below the budget. Lone Tree's wellness center is a prime example of teamwork and developing partnerships to bring a stretch goal to life.

The wellness center is a good case study for small towns building partnerships to fund a new, highly desired recreational facility. The center is run both by the city and the school, who were in desperate need of better athletic spaces for their student teams. The school owns and runs the facility and allows for the joint usage of the facility with the general public. Membership fees to use the facility provide a revenue stream for both the city and the school district.



Case Study: Marion Central Plaza Project

Another community nearby who has benefitted significantly from a partnership with IEDA is Marion, Iowa. The Central Plaza redevelopment project was completed in 2025 and thoroughly reshaped the city's uptown district. The project converted underused public space into a modern community gathering area featuring green space, performance areas, public seating, seasonal ice skating, and infrastructure for festivals and farmers markets.

This development was funded with \$3 million through IEDA's Destination Iowa program. The project cost roughly \$9 million in total, with some of the funds also used to complete the final phase of the CeMar Trail, which connects Uptown Marion to Downtown Cedar Rapids (City of Marion, 2022). Not only did this project beautify the city's downtown, but it also increased foot traffic for nearby businesses. Similar grants could be used in West Branch to pedestrianize the streetscape of Main Street and reinvigorate the downtown environment.



Case Study: North Liberty's Centennial Park

North Liberty's Centennial Park is an example of an advantageous goal making progress through intensive fund finding, teamwork, and partnerships. They provide a participative donation program, where individuals who donate a certain amount get to participate in the naming of different amenities of the park and also get to have their name memorialized on a plaque in the park. This provides incentive for more well-off residents and individuals to donate, feel included in the development process, and make a lasting mark on the park. The city has also built a lot of connections and partnerships with large corporations for larger donations, by providing long term, lasting opportunities to market their brand on the park, like naming a significant/large park amenity and being listed on a donor wall. The city also used a portion of ARPA funds, from back towards the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, to put towards the development of this park. This project is an example of ways to utilize partnerships and community inclusion to help move a larger project forward, to be persistent in pursuing these partnerships and financial streams, and to also leverage any opportunities presented to further goals.



Peer Community: Bellevue Parks

Bellevue, Iowa features an expansive state park, Bellevue State Park, south of the city that overlooks the Mississippi River. The park also includes a butterfly garden, camping sites, trails, hunting grounds (adjacent to but outside park limits), shelters, lodges, a nature center, a playground, modern restrooms, showers, campsites of many varieties, and a dump station.

Bellevue offers approximately 8 neighborhood parks, 3 community parks, 1 mini park, and 2 specialty parks. Spread out between all these parks, amenities provided include a variety of sports fields, a public swimming pool, trails, pavilions, playgrounds, fountains, memorial decorations, campsites, and more. Bellevue capitalizes off its location near large water bodies by also providing opportunities for boating, fishing, and other aquatic recreation.

Bellevue makes a lot of opportunities to capitalize off the natural resources that they are near without too much alternating of the natural environment. A large portion of their parks and recreation is centralized around their proximity to the Mississippi River and other water bodies and thus they market off of scenery and water recreation. Bellevue gains a source of income from renting out certain facilities such as campgrounds, sports fields, and pavilions, as well as hosting sports events at their largest community park, Cole Park. They also provide a rent a bike program where residents can check out a bike for \$2 an hour, with the first 30 minutes being \$1. The city fosters a close relationship between their parks and recreational services providing both paid and free rental services, such as being able to rent out disc golf frisbees from the public library.



Peer Community: Durant Parks

Durant, Iowa has a total of three parks: one community park, one neighborhood park, and 1 mini park. Between these three parks, the amenities provided include ball fields, a tennis court, a playground, a skatepark, park shelters, concessions, restrooms, picnic tables, a walking path, and a rain garden. Fields and shelters are available to reserve for a fee.

The city also has a community center available to residents to rent for events; it can accommodate up to 300 people and provides amenities such as a kitchen with multiple appliances, a full service bar, a 32" TV, sound system, tables and table skirts, and a ballroom. The city also provides a bartender/bar service for a fee. Durant also has a public library through the Scott County Library System that provides programming for all ages.

The community center provides a good income stream for the city with reservations for the building starting at \$100 and reaching up to \$750, depending on how much of the space residents wish to reserve. They also charge for a bartender and for any alcoholic drinks served. In addition to a revenue stream, the center provides for a local place for residents to gather for large events and foster a sense of community.



Peer Community: Lone Tree Parks

Lone Tree, Iowa has a total of three parks, all of which are neighborhood parks. The parks offer multiple amenities including playgrounds, shelters, open grass areas that can be used for sports practices, an all-purpose court, tennis courts, a basketball court, and horseshoe pits. One of their parks has ½ an acre dedicated to being a prairie. Park pavilions are available to reserve for \$20. The city also has multiple recreational facilities, including their public library, a community center, and a wellness center. The public library also serves as a K-12 school media center, so the library is only available to students during school hours and then opens to the general public after school is out for the day. The community center is available for reservations to residents to be used for events. Reservations are \$50 with a \$50 refundable deposit. Amenities include tables and chairs and a full kitchen with a variety of cooking appliances. The wellness center provides amenities such as a raised indoor track, wrestling/exercise room, and a basketball court. The space hosts a wide variety of recreational programs involving different sports and exercise classes, and the space is often used to host a multitude of non-athletic related events, such as blood drives, birthday parties, public meetings, and more.



Peer Community: North Liberty Parks

North Liberty, Iowa has a total of 20 parks: 3 community parks, 4 neighborhood parks, 3 mini parks, and 10 specialty parks/open space areas. They have many of amenities spread out between these areas, such as playgrounds, an amphitheater, sports fields and courts, picnic tables and shelters, trails, an event hall, splash pad, an open-air pavilion, ice rink in the winter, and plenty of open space and nature. All fields, shelters, and green spaces are available for rent. They also have many recreational facilities, including community rooms, a conference center, a fieldhouse, an indoor and an outdoor pool, gyms, campsites, the public library, and a community center.. A wide variety of recreational programming is available for residents, with opportunities for all ages, including fitness classes, skill classes, sports camps, swimming lessons, social activities, and more.

Several parks integrate native plants, which enhances the parks' beauty and protects biodiversity. Some parks combine nature with their parks and recreational offerings, such as stocking one of their lakes with bluegills and catfish for fishing, or preserving forested areas and prairie but integrating trails and bridges through the area for residents to traverse and admire. Some help protect undeveloped natural land, with natural landscape features that provide recreational activities without bringing harm to these environments.

North Liberty prioritizes accessibility in their programming and provides a wide range of opportunities for all age ranges, both open to all or catered to specific age groups. The amenities they provide are also varied and provide opportunities for all interests and activities.

Appendix B 2025 Population Calculations

The 2020 Census shows West Branch had a population of 2,509 residents on April 1st of that census year. By 2024, ACS 5-year estimates indicate that the West Branch population increased to 2,594, a gain of 85 residents.

Building permit data provided by the City of West Branch suggests that ACS estimates, which rely on population samples over five-year periods, do not account for a significant increase in new construction following the most recent census count (263 total units built in 2020 to 2024).

Because the number of new units (263) significantly exceeds the ACS estimated population increase (85), we can reasonably conclude that the ACS estimates undercount West Branch’s current total population.

Therefore, the 2025 population estimate for this study considers anticipated population change based on new housing units built since 2020, using average household size to determine the total number of residents occupying the new units.

Based on building permit data provided by the City of West Branch, 312 new housing units were built since the official census count on April 1st, 2020 through the end of calendar year 2025.

The first quarter of 2026 shows that West Branch continues to add new units at a rapid pace, with 2026 likely to surpass the previous 5 years. To estimate population in 2025, the 2026 building permit data is not included in the calculation. Additionally, we assume that building permits for 2020 prior to April 1st are not reflected in the census count, since construction would

not likely have been completed in time for residents to occupy the newly built units.

Building permit data shows that the total number of 2-bedroom units across all housing typologies from 2020 to 2025 is 113; total 3-bedroom units is 56; total 4-bedroom units is 138; total 5-bedroom units is 19; and total 6-bedroom units is 2. A larger number of bedrooms in a unit would likely correlate to a larger household size.

Because we don’t have data on the number of residents in each new housing unit, our estimated population increase assumes average household size is consistent with the entire community. The 2024 ACS 5-year estimate shows an average household size of 2.44 residents. The average household size based on the most recent census counts are: 2.43 in 2020, 2.39 in 2010, and 2.51 in 2000. We use the 2020 census average household size of 2.43 to estimate the population increase from new units built from 2020 to 2025.

The calculation is 312 new units multiplied by average household size of 2.43, resulting in an estimated 758 new residents since the 2020 census count.

An increase of 758 new residents from the 2020 census count of 2,509 results in an estimated population of 3,267 in 2025.

		2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total	Q1.2026
Single-family	2 bedroom	0	3	0	0	0	1	4	0
	3 bedroom	1	2	5	1	0	10	19	2
	4 bedroom	2	22	9	2	2	1	38	1
	5 bedroom	6	1	2	3	7	0	19	0
	6 bedroom	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
Total		10	29	16	6	9	12	82	3
Zero Lot	2 bedroom	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
	3 bedroom	5	5	7	2	0	0	19	2
	4 bedroom	13	17	23	11	18	0	82	2
Total		18	22	30	14	18	0	102	4
Multi-family	1 bedroom	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
	2 bedroom	11	0	4	57	4	32	108	18
	3 bedroom	0	0	8	0	5	5	18	0
	4 bedroom	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0
Total		11	0	14	57	9	37	128	48
Total units		39	51	60	77	36	49	312	55
Total bedrooms		147	194	211	190	138	115	995	90

Appendix C Community Survey Questions

1. Please share how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).

- West Branch is a great place to live.
- West Branch is a great place to raise children.
- West Branch has adequate childcare services.
- West Branch is a great community for older residents and retirees.
- West Branch provides good opportunities for employment.
- West Branch offers high quality public education.
- West Branch is a great place to start or run a business.
- West Branch has a strong, welcoming sense of community.
- West Branch offers great cultural and recreational opportunities

2. Please drag the items below to rank the importance of each of the following topics to you as a resident of West Branch (#1 at the top = most important).

- Arts, history, and culture
- Childcare
- Community centers (Public library, Town Hall)
- Economic development
- Government provided services (fire, police, water, garbage)
- Local shopping and dining
- Parks and recreation
- Public safety
- Public schools
- Services for seniors

- Other

3. Which of the following investments do you believe is most necessary, urgent, or important to support a vibrant West Branch community in the future?

- Infrastructure maintenance (water, sewer, roads, sidewalks)
- Business and commercial development (Main Street, local shops, restaurants)
- Parks and recreation (playgrounds, trails, community spaces)
- Public safety (police, fire)
- Social services (childcares, senior services)
- Other:

4. Which of the following do you think are the biggest challenges for West Branch's future economic development? (Select up to three answers)

- Lack of available land for development
- Limited local workforce
- Local taxes and fees
- Insufficient infrastructure (roads, utilities, broadband)
- Limited support for entrepreneurs
- Higher wages in neighboring communities
- Not enough retail spaces
- Not sure
- Other:

5. Please drag the items below to rank the importance of each of the following economic development strategies for the future of West Branch. (#1 at the top = most important)

- Retaining local businesses
- Marketing industrial opportunities to new, large employers
- Expanding job opportunities
- Supporting small business growth and entrepreneurship
- Ensuring long-term economic stability
- Offering competitive taxes and fees
- Providing incentives for business or industrial development
- Providing land and infrastructure for growth
- Other:

6. Several community vision scenarios for West Branch are listed below. Please indicate your level of preference towards each statement (like a great deal, like somewhat, neither like nor dislike, dislike somewhat, dislike a great deal).

- Commercial Hub - Development focuses on retail, restaurants, and services to increase tax base (e.g. Tiffin)
- Bedroom Community -Attracts residents through greater affordability while still providing access to nearby cities for most amenities
- Historic Homestead - Emphasizes historical roots and invests in Main Street to become a cultural destination for festivals and events.
- Manufacturing Hub - Leverages access to I-80 to become a player in light manufacturing, logistics, and warehousing.

7. How often do you visit, shop, or dine at West Branch businesses?

- Multiple times per week
- Once per week
- Biweekly
- Monthly
- Never

8. To what extent do local property taxes and fees, such as water and sewer, financially burden you and your family?

- Severely burden
- Somewhat burden
- No burden
- Unsure

9. Please select a statement that most aligns with your thoughts about infrastructure investments.

- It is best to invest in important utility infrastructure improvements (e.g. water, roads) now in order to facilitate growth and expand the tax base
- It is best to defer maintenance costs as long as possible in order to avoid additional fees and taxes for current residents
- It is best to gradually increase fees and taxes to lessen the impact of impending infrastructure costs
- Not sure

10. Please share how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about current housing in West Branch (strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).

- West Branch has adequate housing availability to meet needs.
- West Branch has affordable housing options at all income levels.
- West Branch has a good mix of housing types (single family-homes, townhomes, duplexes, apartments).
- West Branch has adequate housing options for seniors.
- West Branch has adequate services and facilities for the unhoused.
- West Branch has good connectivity between neighborhoods and other destinations (e.g. grocery store, health care, etc.).

11. How important is development of the following types of housing for the future of West Branch? (extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, not at all important)

- Single-family homes on large lots
- Single-family homes on small lots
- Duplexes or townhomes
- Apartments
- Mixed-use buildings with housing above shops or businesses
- Affordable/workforce housing
- Senior housing

12. How important is preservation of agricultural land if West Branch were to consider new housing developments?

- Extremely important
- Somewhat important
- Somewhat unimportant
- Extremely unimportant
- Not sure

13. When thinking about new housing development in West Branch, do any particular positives or negatives come to mind? If so, please elaborate below (text entry).

- How important are the following transportation aspects to you as a West Branch resident? (extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, not at all important)
- Well-maintained roads and streets
- Sidewalks and safe walking paths
- Bike lanes or multi-use trails
- Safe crossings for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Connectivity to nearby towns and cities

14. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of transportation in West Branch? (extremely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, extremely dissatisfied)

- Condition of roads and streets
- Availability and quality of sidewalks and walking paths
- Safety for bicyclists and pedestrians
- Traffic management and signage
- Parking availability in key areas (downtown, schools, parks)

15. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of parks and recreation in West Branch? (extremely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, extremely dissatisfied)

- Number and variety of parks and trails
- Quality and maintenance of facilities
- Children's recreational programs and activities
- Adult recreational programs and activities
- Accessibility and safety of parks
- Natural beauty and open space

16. Which types of parks and recreation improvements would you most like to see in West Branch? (Select up to three)

- New walking/biking trails
- Sports fields or courts
- Playground equipment for children
- Picnic shelters or community gathering spaces
- Community gardens or natural areas
- Swimming pool
- Splash pad
- Recreational programs for youth
- Recreational programs for seniors
- Recreational programs for adults
- Other:

17. How much would you be willing to pay per month to see your most preferred parks and recreational improvements become reality? (sliding scale from \$0 to \$30)

18. What barriers, if any, make it difficult for you or your household to use the library or participate in city programs and events?

- Activity times don't fit my schedule
- Lack of transportation options
- I'm not sure what programs are offered or when they are
- Programs don't meet the needs or interest of my household
- Activities are not accessible for people with disabilities
- Other:

19. Please share how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about historic preservation and historic assets in West Branch (strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree).

- Historic downtown buildings are important for West Branch's city identity
- Historic downtown buildings need to be updated and/or renovated
- West Branch's identity is closely intertwined with the Hoover Presidential Library
- I am familiar with West Branch's history of being a part of the Underground Railroad

20. What are you most proud of in West Branch? (text entry)

21. How long have you lived in West Branch?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 year
- 11 to 20 years
- More than 20 years
- I don't live in West Branch

22. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65+
- Prefer to not answer

23. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to answer

24. Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Another race or ethnicity (please specify):
- Prefer not to answer

25. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- 2 year degree
- 4 year degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate
- Prefer not to answer

26. What is your household income? (before taxes, annual)

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000–\$49,999
- \$50,000–\$74,999
- \$75,000–\$99,999
- \$100,000–\$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to answer

27. Do you currently rent or own your home?

- Rent
- Own
- Other:
- Prefer not to answer

28. Which ways of receiving information about community decision-making would be most helpful to you? (Select all that apply)

- Public workshops or town halls
- Online dashboards or interactive maps
- Email newsletters from the city
- Social media updates from the city
- Other (please specify)