

# Muscatine County Comprehensive Plan

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## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

Muscatine County is located on the border of eastern Iowa and western Illinois along the shores of the Mississippi River. Refer to Map 1.1 for the townships and cities located in Muscatine County. Muscatine, Iowa is the largest community in Muscatine County with a population of 22,886 (2010). Muscatine County is within 154 miles of Des Moines, Iowa and 205 miles to Chicago, Illinois. Interstate 80 runs north of the county border providing good cross-county access to the national transportation system. The population of Muscatine County is currently 42,745 (2010 Census). Residents describe the county as welcoming, diverse, and industrious. It also mixes agriculture with industry and considered a pearl along the Mississippi River, tied to the rich button manufacturing history from mussel shells in the river.

Muscatine County recognizes the importance of a well-defined comprehensive plan with a vision, clear goals, and policies. To further the county vision, the Board of Supervisors has updated its plan with the assistance of the Zoning Commission, Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee, focus groups, and citizen involvement. Bi-State Regional Commission assisted with plan facilitation and compiling of the document. This broad-based involvement offered opportunities from a diverse and comprehensive source of county and city interests. The purpose of the plan is to outline the vision, existing conditions, future needs, and land use identification as well as to set goals and objectives and recommend strategies for implementation.

### ***History of Zoning and Comprehensive Planning in Muscatine County***

Muscatine County is enabled by the State of Iowa under Chapter 335 County Zoning to adopt a zoning ordinance. Zoning is a police power utilized by a local government to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of its residents. The Iowa Code also requires that county zoning regulations should be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan. Although zoning applies to many land activities, Iowa Code exempts farm land, farm houses, and farm buildings from county zoning regulations as long as they are used for primarily agricultural purposes. The Iowa Code doesn't establish how counties should determine how farm land, farm houses, or farm buildings should be defined, leaving it to the counties to determine the definitions locally. Ultimately, Muscatine County has the ability to adopt zoning regulations and must have a comprehensive plan. Under state law, the county has the latitude to determine how these regulatory and guidance documents will be developed and utilized.

The first zoning ordinance for Muscatine County was adopted in 1960 and was followed by the adoption of the county subdivision ordinance in 1963. In 1998, the Muscatine County Comprehensive Plan document was adopted by the County Board. In an effort to routinely review the planning and zoning processes, the Muscatine County Board of Supervisors agreed in 2013 to undergo an update of the county's comprehensive plan under the advisement of the Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee. The planning process includes gathering of information and data, a public involvement process, and evaluation of the land use policies and future land use.

# Muscatine County Comprehensive Plan

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## ***Elements of the Comprehensive Plan***

This updated comprehensive plan is composed of several elements, from the county vision to implementation strategies. It is a valuable document with the following purposes: advisory, educational, guidance, coordination, and needs. The plan declares the county purpose and policies. It informs the citizens of strengths and weaknesses. The plan guides land use decisions and investments. It provides elements for joint efforts among community groups and organizations within and outside Muscatine County. The plan also outlines areas for further study or planning. It documents community needs that will help the county pursue funding opportunities, such as grants, loans, public-private partnerships, etc. The planning process is just as important as the plan document. Gathering information and ideas, developing a framework to guide how decisions on land use and development are made, and prioritizing goals and strategies for implementation are essential for a successful plan document.

As an advisory document, the plan's goals and objectives transform the county vision into achievable tasks or benchmarks. It provides the foundation for decisions on land use, public infrastructure and services, public facilities, growth, development, and level of public investment needed to meet future community needs. As part of the plan development, Iowa's Smart Planning Principles were considered as part of the plan update process and incorporated in varying degrees based on the public and decision-making process. The principles include:

- Collaboration
- Efficiency, transparency, and consistency
- Clean, renewable and efficient energy
- Occupational diversity
- Revitalization
- Housing diversity
- Community character
- Natural Resources and agricultural protection
- Sustainable design
- Transportation diversity

The "County Profile" section of the plan outlines existing socio-economic characteristics of the county by population, gender, income, housing, and educational attainment. It also outlines trends and projections for the future of Muscatine County. The "Resources Profile" inventories characteristics of the county related to agriculture, watersheds, floodplains, geology, slope, wildlife habitats, and historic and cultural facilities.

Land use defines where people live and where they work or play. Land use patterns shape the nature of the community by reflecting urban and non-urban activity through population, employment, dwelling units, school enrollment, etc. Some locations represent areas with a greater density of urban activity, from residential, commercial, industrial, institutional or recreational land uses, or a lesser density of activity that may include parks or recreation areas, agriculture, and open space. Natural resources affect land use patterns through development limitations due to slope, erosional surfaces, prime farmland, floodplain, wetlands, archaeological

# Muscatine County Comprehensive Plan

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sites, etc. By planning for the arrangement and intensity of land uses, Muscatine County can reduce infrastructure costs, which often result when the long-range effects of zoning, subdivisions, and site development decisions are not considered.

Public infrastructure and services provide the basic facilities and equipment needed by the county to serve its residents. The various land uses and their related activities create greater or lesser need for these facilities or services depending on the activities. While one acre of land with new houses generates more total revenue to a county than an acre of farmland, this does not provide the entire picture of the county's fiscal stability. In reality, there are times when it costs local government more to provide services to homeowners than these residential landowners pay in property taxes. In contrast, commercial and industrial land increases the tax base and helps balance local budgets in order to provide a variety of public services. While one type of land use is not better than another, balancing a variety of land uses in the county and directing development toward existing communities provides reliable services and adds stability and quality of life for residents.

An extremely important section of the plan is the "Strategies for Implementation" section. This section is a summary of specific projects, tasks, and/or actions to be undertaken in the next 20 years. The implementation strategies are considered the means by which Muscatine County can address its needs and meet its goals. The course of action for implementation will require periodic review to assess needs, timing, and financial feasibility. In the implementation of projects, careful consideration will be given to full utilization of existing facilities and funding opportunities.

The final section of the plan relates to mechanisms for plan implementation. This section outlines development tools a county can utilize to implement its strategies for action.

## **Public Involvement**

Comprehensive planning in Muscatine County began in 1998 with the adoption of the first county comprehensive plan. The current update allows for the review of these prior planning efforts and incorporates either new or enhanced information and/or confirms the appropriateness of the existing data and policies.

Public involvement is a critical component to building consensus in the planning process. Muscatine County provided three methods for public input into the initial planning process. Town hall type meetings (Muscatine County Visioning and Land Use Workshops) were held between January 8 and 29, 2014 at two locations in Muscatine County, including Muscatine and West Liberty. Participants were invited to share their opinions on what they liked about Muscatine County and its strengths. They also provided their input on needs for improvement and changes in land use for Muscatine County in 20 years. A summary of these meetings can be found in Appendix A. To supplement this public input, a survey was also used. There were 77 respondents to the survey, and the results are included in Appendix A. Additionally, feedback was solicited on the draft plan from various sectors—business, local government, agriculture, recreation—to further refine plan elements. Another opportunity for input involved the use of Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee meetings.

# Muscatine County Comprehensive Plan

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The Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee represented diverse interests in Muscatine County, including representatives from agriculture, real estate, small business, homeowners, and environmental interests. The Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee was called on to help formulate and/or review a variety of issues and viewpoints in the development of the plan goals and policies. Each of these public involvement opportunities aided in the development of this plan. The Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee presented a final draft of the comprehensive plan at a public hearing of the Zoning Commission on October 3, 2014 to solicit additional comments and make recommendations to the County Board of Supervisors. County officials used the public comments to shape the final plan.

# Muscatine County Comprehensive Plan

Map 1.1  
**General Location Map**  
Muscatine County Comprehensive Plan

