

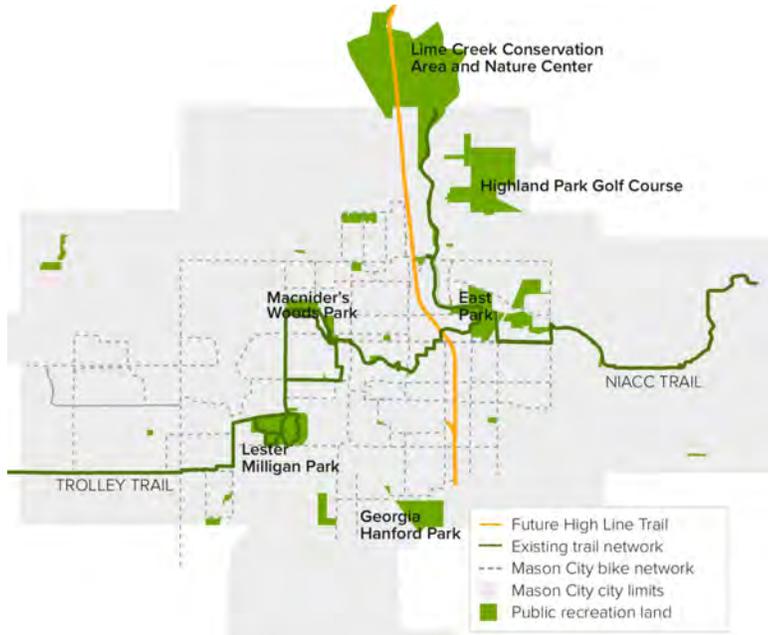
# A PLANNING PERSPECTIVE

APA IOWA CHAPTER  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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JAN. 2019, ISSUE 1

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## MASON CITY IN THE NEWS

SUBMITTED BY STEVEN J. VAN STEENHUYSE, AICP  
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Mason City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, completed in 2014, is recognized in the Fall 2018 edition of Iowa Natural Heritage Magazine. The City worked with RDG Planning and Design to formulate the plan, which received an Iowa Chapter APA Award in 2015.

Phase 1 of the trail and bikeway system is now complete, providing a complete non-motorized network traversing the entire city and connecting to regional trails. The City Council is dedicated to completing the 3-phase active transportation system proposed in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.

The article also highlights a planned major expansion of the trail network: an 8-mile rail-to-trail conversion of an elevated rail bed through the heart of Mason City. This "High Line" trail will include several wide bridge overpasses that will be redeveloped into unique public spaces. Mason City has recognized the importance of active transportation to improve quality of life and attract the skilled workforce that small Midwestern cities need.

The Mason City - Clear Lake area provides a plethora of development and attractions that highlight good planning. Make North Iowa a destination this year, and feel free to stop in to City Hall - we love to show planners around!



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## SPRING CAREER FAIRS

Iowa State University College of Design is hosting their 2019 Design Career Fair from noon to 5pm on Thursday, Feb. 21 at the ISU Memorial Union. More information is available online.

University of Iowa is hosting their 2019 Spring Job & Internship Fair from 11am to 3pm on Wednesday, Feb. 20 at the Iowa Memorial Union. More information is available online.

## JOHNSTON'S WALKABILITY STUDY

SUBMITTED BY MINDY MOORE, AICP  
 PLANNER, SNYDER & ASSOCIATES, INC., MMOORE@SNYDER-ASSOCIATES.COM

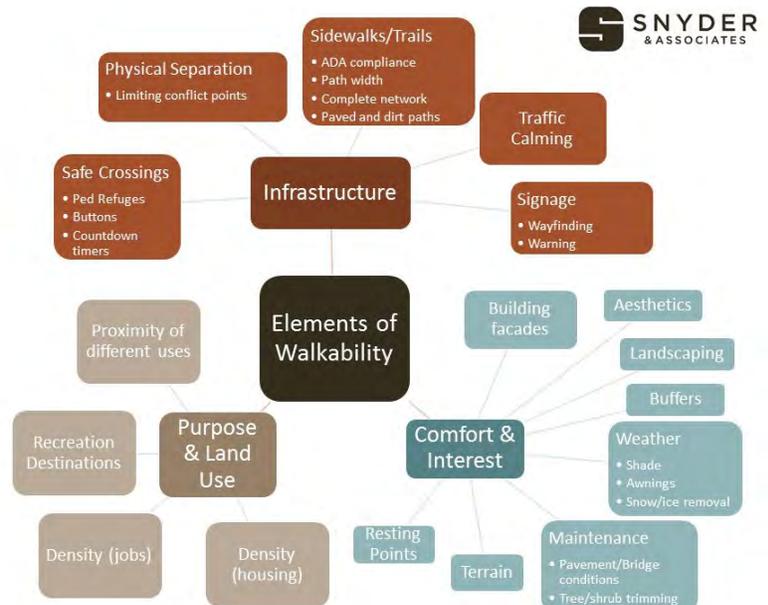
In November 2018, the City of Johnston completed a city-wide walkability study. A broad range of factors influence walkability, so the project required involvement from many City departments -- Parks, Public Works, Community Development, Police, and the City Manager's Office. A project Steering Committee representing the City Council and staff, Park Board, Trails Committee, School District, and business interests was also identified. The committee met three times over this eight-month-long project, while City staff kept them up-to-date with monthly progress reports and ensured ample opportunity for feedback. Snyder & Associates, Inc. served as the planning consultant.

To start, Snyder performed a conditions assessment consisting of existing and planned trails and sidewalks, destinations, school walk zones, and crash data (see photo above). To supplement the assessment, an online public engagement effort was conducted. The effort attracted 67 contributors who provided 214 data features and comments related to community walkability. The resulting information included problematic intersections or crossings, gaps in sidewalk and trail routes, hazardous conditions, and pedestrian destinations.

Working closely with staff and the Steering Committee, Snyder & Associates prioritized each data feature as either high, medium, or low urgency and assigned a recommendation for how to address each issue, such as "review for intersection improvements" or "build sidewalk with Sidewalk Program." The plan included guidance on the types of intersection and crossing improvements to consider, along with estimated construction costs and expected lifecycles. It also included a list of potential funding opportunities for sidewalk and trail improvements.

Finally, Snyder & Associates reviewed 11 city ordinances and policies and provided recommendations to make them more pedestrian-friendly. For example, recommendations addressed landscaping in the road right-of-way, site plan design standards for requiring pedestrian paths to connect sidewalks or trails to main entrances, and when to construct a typical sidewalk versus a sidepath trail.

At the conclusion of the project, Snyder & Associates presented the planning process, data, and final plan to the City Council, ensuring all of their questions were answered and that they understood the source of the information and resulting recommendations. Using the Implementation chapter of the plan, the City will continue to make pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and policy updates.



# **CEDAR RAPIDS UPDATED CODE**

SUBMITTED BY CHARLIE NICHOLS, AICP  
PLANNER, CITY OF CEDAR RAPIDS, C.NICHOLS@CEDAR-RAPIDS.ORG

The City of Cedar Rapids is excited to start off the New Year with a new zoning code! The updated zoning code, which the City Council adopted on December 18 of 2018, officially went into effect January 1st.

The new zoning code transitions the City of Cedar Rapids from a traditional zoning code, which encourages the separation of various land uses, to a hybrid zoning code which incorporates form-based districts where appropriate. The form-based districts in the new code provide site design standards that focus on the relationship between buildings and the street (the public realm).

As the City of Cedar Rapids continues to see significant redevelopment, which started after the 2008 flood, the form-based districts in the new code will support the unique characteristics of individual neighborhoods and commercial districts, support multiple modes of transportation, while offering more flexibility for developers.

In addition, the new code provides a streamlined development approval process that is more clear and predictable by raising the standard for site and building design in the code and increasing administrative approval authority. The updated code also features more flexibility in the form of administrative exceptions to design standards in an effort to reduce unnecessary variance applications. Another new feature of the updated code are reduced parking minimums, in some cases parking maximums, and required bicycle parking.

The effort to update the zoning code began in 2015, marketed as ReZone Cedar Rapids, with the adoption of a new comprehensive plan entitled EnvisionCR. Updating the City's zoning code to align with and support the goals outlined in the new plan was identified as a key, high priority objective by the comprehensive plan. The 3-year process included over 50 public input opportunities and over a thousand individual participants providing input.

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# **ALTERNATIVE ENERGY CONFERENCE**

SUBMITTED BY SARAH J. GARDNER  
SENIOR PLANNER, BI-STATE REGIONAL COMMISSION, SGARDNER@BISTATEONLINE.ORG

Is your community ready for renewable energy? It does more than power homes and businesses. In recent years, alternative energy has become a robust economic engine that generates jobs and tax revenue, but not every community has the zoning and permitting process in place to pave the way for solar and wind installations.

On Tuesday, March 5, the Bi-State Regional Commission will host a one-day alternative energy conference for municipal leaders and administrators. The event will feature sessions focused on model ordinances, redeveloping brownfields as solar sites, pollinator and prairie patches at energy installations, community solar initiatives, and energy efficiency rebates for municipal buildings.

Panelists at the conference will include speakers from the Great Plains Institute, Midwest Renewable Energy Association, Environmental Law & Policy Center, Argonne National Laboratory, Fresh Energy, Ameren, ComEd, and MidAmerican Energy.

The free event will take place from 9 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at the Gerber Center at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Bi-State serves a five county region in eastern Iowa and western Illinois, and welcomes any planners from APA Iowa to attend the event. For more information and to register to attend, contact Sarah Gardner, Senior Planner, at [sgardner@bistateonline.org](mailto:sgardner@bistateonline.org).

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# LINN COUNTY PARTNERS WITH IOWA INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ON WIND FARM GUIDANCE TOOLS

SUBMITTED BY LES BECK

DIRECTOR, LINN COUNTY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT, LES.BECK@LINNCOUNTY.ORG



Felix Freidman, a company representative for Washburn Wind Energy LLC, speaks during a public meeting of the Black Hawk County Planning and Zoning Commission in April, 2018, in Waterloo.

Photo Credit: Brandon Pollock, The Courier Staff Photographer

If you have ever looked at a wind resource map for Iowa, you know that the highest average annual wind speed is found in northwestern Iowa, and consequently the highest concentration of wind farms is predominantly located in that part of the state. However, with advances in technology, wind developers are beginning to look eastward. In April 2018, Black Hawk County (northwest of Linn County) approved a special permit for a 35-turbine wind farm, to be located south of Waterloo.

With wind farm projects moving toward the eastern part of the state, Linn County wanted to be ahead of the curve in regards to any review of potential applications, and has partnered with the University of Iowa's Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC) to prepare a Wind Farm Suitability Analysis for the unincorporated Linn County area. The results of the project will include a decision-making guide and GIS mapping tools for use by staff and county officials in the review of potential utility-scale wind farms in rural Linn County.

While wind energy is a popular option for sustainable power, it also requires the placement of large wind turbines that are expensive, can be logistically challenging to site, and that are facing increased public scrutiny of their impacts. This project considers the wind resource specific to Linn County, current technologies and trends, and federal, state, and local-level plans to identify potential locations that a wind developer might consider in Linn County. The project also includes a spatial analysis of Linn County, using GIS mapping tools, to examine environmental, land use, and current county regulatory constraints.

In addition to the GIS mapping tools, the final deliverable will include policy and procedural recommendations for the county, including an application review guide tied to the Conditional Use Permit standards for approval. The guide will aid the examination of anticipated site-specific and community impacts of wind farm placement and construction, including impacts on the natural environment, transportation and utility infrastructure, and more.

The project will also include a public input component to help identify general attitudes toward alternative and renewable energy in the county, and specifically regarding the benefits and impacts of utility-scale wind energy production. This component may include interviews, focus groups, public forums, and/or a survey of key stakeholders.

This project is another piece to Linn County's wide-ranging approach to alternative and renewable energy policies and programs. In 2012, the Iowa Utilities Board designated the county as a Small Wind Innovation Zone, just 1 of 3 such designations in Iowa. The Linn County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2013, includes seven plan elements grounded in the Iowa Smart Planning Principles. The Alternative and Renewable Energy plan element was the second-highest priority in public opinion polling, behind only the Resource Protection plan element. In 2017, the Linn County Board of Supervisors adopted a "We're Still In" resolution "...honoring the objectives of the Paris Agreement and to the principles of energy efficiency, energy conservation and sustainability." Also in 2017, the county partnered with the City of Cedar Rapids and the Midwest Renewable Energy Association on a Solar Group Buy initiative, allowing home and commercial property owners access to lower prices for solar installations through the power of volume purchasing.

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# IOWA PLANNER SPOTLIGHT:

## CHARLIE NICHOLS, AICP

Planner, City of Cedar Rapids  
APA Iowa Chapter Board Member



### **Why did you decide to become a planner?**

I've always been fascinated by the built environment and the forces that change it over time. Studying and practicing planning has allowed me to explore this interest.

### **What are your areas of expertise?**

Area planning, grant writing, code enforcement, development review.

### **What aspects of planning do you enjoy the most?**

I enjoy working with different groups of people who all have different perspectives and passions. The variety of causes and projects happening at any one time means my job is never boring.

### **Describe a recent project you've contributed to that you are proud of. Why is it important? Highlight methods that made the project a success.**

In Burlington I was involved in the planning and visioning process for transforming the downtown riverfront, turning it from an empty parking lot into a community asset. I am also proud to be part of the team working on implementing a new zoning code in Cedar Rapids. Staff here have done a tremendous job in facilitating post-flood development and community engagement, and the new zoning code is a reflection of that.

### **What is one planning challenge you foresee for Iowa or your community over the next 10 years? What preparation do you recommend to meet this challenge?**

The rate of change in all spheres of life- economic, family, social, etc.- has been increasing. At the same time, public engagement has been decreasing. These two factors- increasing change and decreasing public engagement- create a challenge for planners looking to create a plan or a vision for a community that is representative of the people in that community. I think one of the solutions in this problem is to get smaller. Focus on engaging people at the neighborhood level. Identify and train neighborhood advocates. Embrace technological solutions that make it easier for people to provide feedback.

### **Do you have a favorite book about planning?**

I read Antifragile by Nassim Taleb last year and it's really shifted my perspective on planning. While Antifragile isn't a traditional planning book, I think it has a lot of crossover with the planning world. The book is about systems and ecosystems that get stronger under stress, disorder, volatility, and change. We know that the only constant in life is change. As planners, I think we should strive to plan communities that benefit from change over time.

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# DON'T MISS OUT CHECK OUT THESE OPPORTUNITIES...

## JOB POSTINGS

### **Research Analyst Intermediate / Geographic Information System**

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: Duluth, MN

### **Research & Innovation Office Director**

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: St. Paul, MN

### **Community Development Specialist**

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: Appleton, MN

### **City Planner**

Job Type: Full Time  
Location: Burlington, IA

## GRANTS

Feb. 14: Art Works Grant

Feb. 28: Prairie Meadows Community Betterment Grants

Mar. 15: Hometown Pride

Mar. 15: Broadband Grant

April 11: Challenge America, National Endowment for the Arts

May 1: Art Project Grant

May 1: School Arts Experience Grant

May 1: Iowa Arts Council Capacity Building Grants

May 1: Cultural Heritage Project Grant

May 1: Iowa Great Places Designation & Re-Designation

## RESOURCES

Jan. 21: Apply for the 2019 Iowa Walking College, a six-month educational program.

Feb. 1: Proposal deadline for The Iowa League of Cities 2019 Annual Conference and Exhibit, September 25-27 in Dubuque.

Feb. 6-8: Iowa Tourism Conference, Altoona

Feb. 19: The Iowa League of Cities' Annual Legislative Day

Feb. 26: Design Professionals Day on the Hill, Capitol

Mar. 5: Alternative Energy Conference

Mar. 25-28: Annual Spring Iowa Parks & Recreation Conference, Des Moines

Apr. 18: AIA Spring Conference, Ames

## CHAPTER UPDATES

Jan. 18 - APA Iowa Chapter Board Meeting at Des Moines MPO office at 420 Watson Powell Jr. Parkway

Apr. 13-16 - American Planning Association National Conference, San Francisco

Apr. 15 - All Iowa Reception at the APA National Conference, San Francisco

Follow us on Facebook to stay up to date on events and happenings.

Submit your community updates for April's newsletter by Friday, April 5th.

Fill out the form to be featured in our Planner Spotlight.

