

## 2. COMMUNITY VISION

Early in the planning process, the City Council and Planning Commission engaged in a visioning exercise designed to articulate what Marshalltown means to its citizens and what kind of place it should be in twenty years.

The resulting community vision, which is presented in this chapter, consists of two elements that guided the preparation of the new Comprehensive Plan:

- a *vision statement* describing Marshalltown in 2015 through its major characteristics; and
- identification of *issues and assets* to be addressed in the plan.

These three elements provide a solid foundation for the new plan. The success of the plan depends in large measure on the values expressed here.

When the plan is reviewed in future years, the review process should begin by verifying these elements or modifying them to reflect changes in the community. Unless the values that underpin the community's view of itself and its future are clearly defined, no future update of the plan will adequately express appropriate goals or succeed in building community consensus around needed actions.

### *Vision Statement*

#### Vision

#### Related Goals

**City of opportunity, for . . .**

Businesses  
Education and workforce development  
Health maintenance  
Employment  
Family support and development  
Personal expression -- arts and culture  
Suitable and affordable housing  
Control of own destiny (as community and individuals)

**Moderate growth**

Grow to 32,000 in the next twenty years (an increase of about 5,000 people -- an average of 200-250 people, or 80-100 households, each year)

<b>An affordable place to live</b>	Control of public spending (fiscal responsibility) Jobs with livable wages
<b>Diversified economy</b>	Variety of company sizes Variety of industries, with value-added agriculture a major component Variety of technologies Both labor-intensive and capital-intensive businesses
<b>Regional center for the 5-county area, particularly a government center</b>	Expansion of Marshalltown's role as a governmental hub Unified retail marketing and promotion Retention and expansion of hospital and other medical
<b>Distribution center</b>	Maintenance and expansion of railroad center Creation of state-of-the-art intermodal facility (rail-to-truck) Improved highway access to Des Moines (IA 330 and US Support of local agriculture Airport improvements Fiber optics hub
<b>"The meeting place of Iowa"</b>	Mid-sized convention center Banquet facilities More upscale hotel/motel rooms, clustered for efficiency, More/better restaurants More reasons to come to Marshalltown (softball-field improvements, festivals, more entertainment, other activities, perhaps a motor speedway) Generally improved access and internal transportation
<b>A good place to raise a family</b>	Personal safety Property security Easy mobility and access Cleanliness Healthy, safe environment Activities for all ages, including arts, culture, recreation, Wide range of housing types and neighborhoods
<b>A riverfront city</b>	Finding ways to utilize the waterfront in spite of the levee
<b>Full range of age groups, including children and young adults</b>	Attraction of young adults (18-34) by providing educational, employment, recreation and housing opportunities

## "A city moving together"

Volunteerism  
Embrace of ethnic diversity  
Broad civic leadership and involvement

## *Issues and Assets*

Identifying issues, assets and opportunities gives a community an improved perspective on where it's been, where it might be headed if no significant changes are made or actions taken, and what it might build upon if it wants to head in a different direction. Each of these items is described in this section.

### **Issues**

*The city currently has too much land in commercial use, much of it in the "wrong" places.* A comparison of Marshalltown with other free-standing communities, both larger and smaller, shows that Marshalltown has twice as much land in commercial use as any other similar community. Much commercial land is underutilized, has never been converted to commercial use (e.g., along West Nevada and Madison), or has become devalued (e.g., the old Hy-Vee site). One cause for this has been the numerous relocations of US Highway 30, which encouraged commercial development wherever it moved. As a result, there are demands for commercial land where none is available, in spite of a general community-wide glut. \*

*The city currently has too much vacant land zoned for single-family residential development, but no vacant land zoned for multi-family residential.* Of the 3,768 acres zoned R-2, only 1,509 have been developed. This is because the City's "default" zoning is R-2 Single-Family Residential. Some of this land is in public ownership or agricultural use and should be zoned as such. Certain residential areas should be rezoned to a new residential classification that allows smaller lots, thus removing the nonconforming stigma from properties that are essentially sound but for some revitalization efforts.

*The housing market is very tight.* Apartment rents are rising, and some people who work in Marshalltown cannot afford to live there. Some seniors stay in their homes beyond the point at which they can adequately maintain them. This is all evidence that the city's housing market is "tight" -- that is, there aren't enough of the right kinds of options for everyone who wants them. Particular markets that are underserved include those most commonly associated with multi-family housing options: young singles, low- and moderate-income families, "empty-nesters" and seniors.

*Changing demographics are changing housing needs and demands on public services.* Emigrant labor has seriously affected certain neighborhoods. The meat-packing industry employs large numbers of men who are either single or living apart from their families. These workers often live several to a house or apartment both to make their living arrangements more affordable and to save money to send "home". Perhaps the incident most revealing of the changes these workers have brought has been the dramatic increase in demand for soccer fields -- once the exclusive purview of young children, now a major adult recreation.

*A shortage of municipal resources has led to public disinvestment and loss of a strong public example.* Community resources are always limited and must always be stretched, but the City's predicament the last few years has been more extreme than usual. It is beginning to show, particularly in terms of maintenance and updating of public properties. Riverview Park is most obviously in need to attention, but other examples abound. And because municipal investment is a powerful tool for shaping private investment, the City has lost some of its polish.

*Land use and development are inextricably related to economic development.* Marshalltown has been one of Iowa's economic "bright spots". However, economic development remains very much an issue. There are mixed feelings about use of tax abatements as an economic development tool, with concerns about fairness to retailers (who do not receive them, vs. industrial businesses that do), to long-resident industries, and to future taxpayers. There is some belief, particularly in the business community, that Marshalltown has not always taken desirable risks in developing new housing projects or in appealing to new industries. This group feels the City must be more accommodating to industry and suggests that the City apply more flexible land-use controls and show more willingness to work with developers.

*The City lacks well-defined gateways and internal delineations.* Entry points to the City as a whole, as well as to the central business district and individual neighborhoods, are poorly defined at best. These gateways give a community a sense of place and call attention to physical assets.

## **Assets**

Marshalltown's assets may be divided into two groups: tangible (physical), and intangible:

### *Tangible assets:*

- County Courthouse
- Downtown generally, specific (historic) buildings particularly
- The Iowa River, Linn Creek and Anson Creek
- Attractive topography
- Fisher Community Center
- Iowa Valley Community College
- Iowa Veterans Home
- Regional medical center
- Riverview Park
- American Legion Golf Course
- Industrial park with expansion room

### *Intangible assets*

- Good educational system
- Good medical care
- Community work ethic
- Community caring ethic
- Volunteerism