

CITY OF DECORAH

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

2012



Resolution No. 2486

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE DECORAH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - 2012 (PLAN UPDATE)

WHEREAS, a public hearing was held on October 10, 2011 at 6:00 P.M. in Decorah Public Library on the proposed adoption of the Decorah Comprehensive Plan, hereinafter referred to as the Comprehensive Plan Update, and

WHEREAS, said plan is a policy document that considers the 13 Smart Planning elements such as; community's demographics, public facilities and utilities, land use, transportation, housing, natural and cultural resources, hazards, and implementation procedures, and

WHEREAS, an integral part of the plan is providing opportunities for public input in the Comprehensive Plan Update process, and

WHEREAS, the Decorah Planning and Zoning Commission has held 2 public input sessions on the Comprehensive Plan Update and has recommended it be approved, and

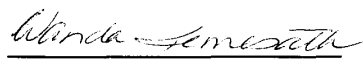
WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Plan Update has been subject of, or a discussion item on the agenda of, numerous public meetings, work-sessions, and presentations, and

WHEREAS, the Comprehensive Plan Update is a primary tool of the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, and City staff, and

WHEREAS, said plan is in the best interest of City, now therefore **BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED** that the Decorah City Council hereby approves and adopts the Decorah Comprehensive Plan Update as a replacement in its entirety to the existing Plan this 6TH day of February, 2012


Don Arendt, Mayor

ATTEST:


Wanda Hemesath, City Clerk

CITY OF DECORAH

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2012

Comprehensive Planning

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INTRODUCTION



Background

The comprehensive planning process documented in this plan began in 2010 when all 8 incorporated communities in the county, as well as Winneshiek County, passed a resolution entering into an intergovernmental agreement for the purpose of developing and updating comprehensive plans. The City of Decorah has gone through the comprehensive planning process in the past, most recently with a plan completed in 1992.

In May 2011 graduate students from the University of Iowa School of Urban & Regional Planning presented a Smart Planning Principles document to the City of Decorah. This plan has been an invaluable resource for the Comprehensive Planning Committee. A copy of this plan is available for the public at City Hall and at Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission.

Public Participation

Public participation is an important part of the comprehensive planning process. For a plan to develop, decision makers need to hear ideas, thoughts, and opinions from their citizens and stakeholders.

In an effort to help guide the planning process, the Planning Commission held two input sessions, which were publicized two weeks in advance in the local paper and posted on community boards. The public was invited to review the plan and the maps and provide any input or comments for the planning commission to consider. Both input sessions were held on July 19th at Decorah City Hall. The two sessions were held at different times to accommodate work schedules of all citizens. The first input session was held from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00p.m. and the second was held from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Comments and photos from the public input sessions can be found in Appendix C.

Purpose of the Plan

The City of Decorah's Comprehensive Plan is intended to assist local officials and community members as they make future decisions regarding growth, management, and preservation of the community. Decorah's plan was developed under the guidance of Iowa Smart Planning Legislation SF 2389. The plan is broken down into 10 elements. These include:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities and Community Facilities
- Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources
- Hazards
- Economic Development
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Land Use
- Implementation

Location

The City of Decorah is located in the center of Winneshiek County in Northeast Iowa near Minnesota and Wisconsin. The Upper Iowa River bisects the community on the east side, "original Decorah" from the community on the west side. In addition to being located on the Upper Iowa River, the City of Decorah is located on U.S. Highway 52 and Iowa Highway 9. Figure 1 shows an aerial photo of the Decorah area and Figure 2 illustrates the location of the city in relation to the county, region, and state.

History

Decorah was established as the county seat in 1851. The city was platted two years later in 1853. Decorah was named after Waukon-Decorah, a prominent Chief of the Winnebago Indian Tribe. Other Native American tribes that occupied the area were the Sauk, Fox, and Oneota.

Nine members of the William Day (1791-1860) family are credited with being the first settlers of Decorah, Iowa. History shows the Day family camped beside a spring, now known as Day Spring, and shortly began building. In March 1849, they were joined by the William Painter (1820-1902) family and by John Sutton Morse (1808-1887). It is stated that Day built the first Hotel, now known as Hotel Winneshiek, while Painter and Morse focused on milling in Decorah.

The railroad reached Decorah in 1869 and provided transportation for passengers and freight for nearly 100 years. Wagons and horse drawn coaches were the only other alternative for moving citizens and commercial goods. Railroad service ended in Decorah in February 1979.

Although the settlement began in 1849, Decorah was not incorporated as a city until 1871. The small settlement was designated the county seat in 1851 and the first county courthouse was built in 1857. In 1903 the court house was replaced with today's present building. The jail, located near the courthouse, was built in 1887.

The first plat of the city, what is now known as "Original Decorah," was made in 1856. West Decorah, or the settlement on the other side of the Upper Iowa River, was incorporated in 1878, and legally recognized by a legislative act in 1894. The two settlements, Decorah and West Decorah, did not merge into a single unit until 1902.

Education was important to the community and its settlers as well. The Norwegian Luther College, a private four year liberal arts school, was established in Decorah in 1862 with the purchase of 32 acres for the college. The first building on campus was built in 1865.

Figure 1: Aerial Photo of Decorah

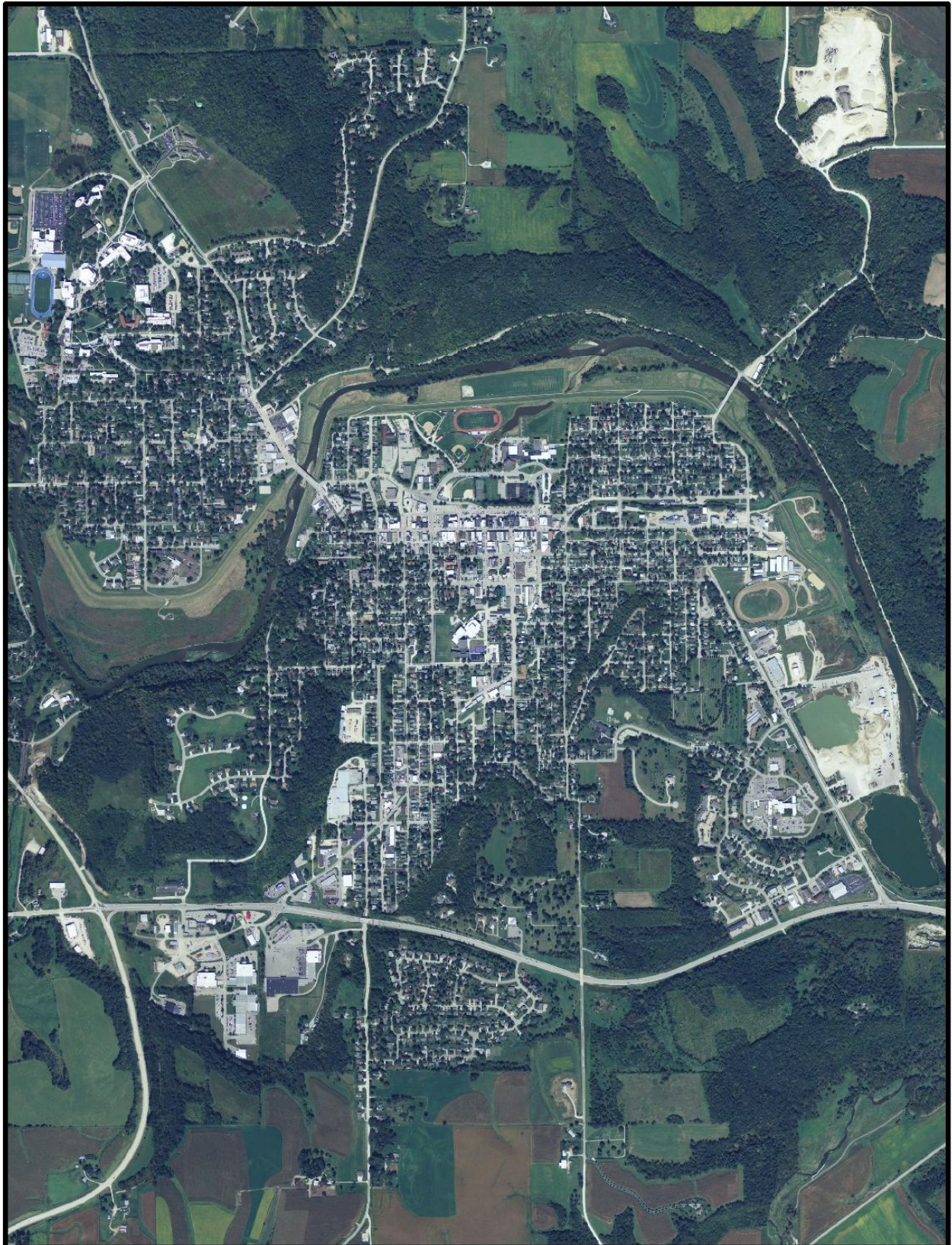
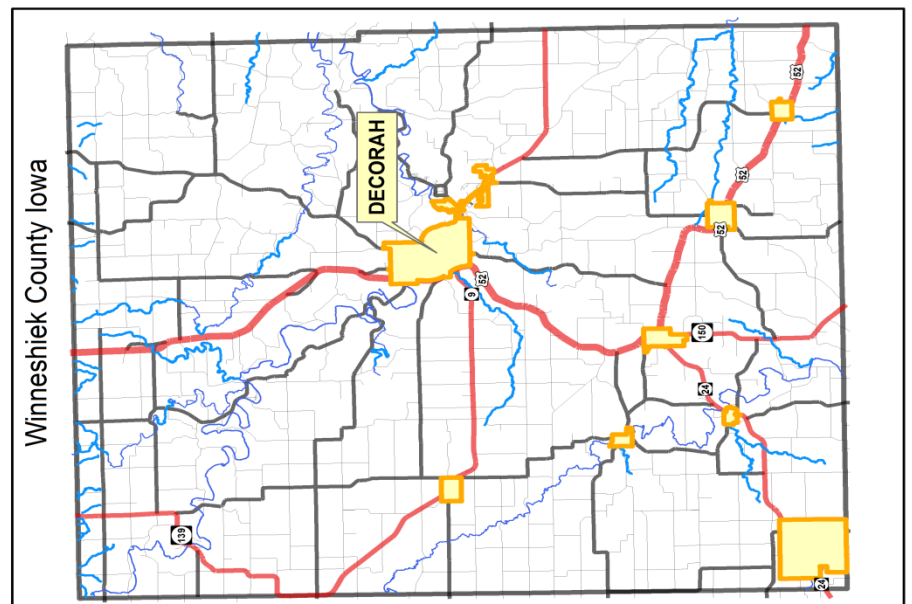
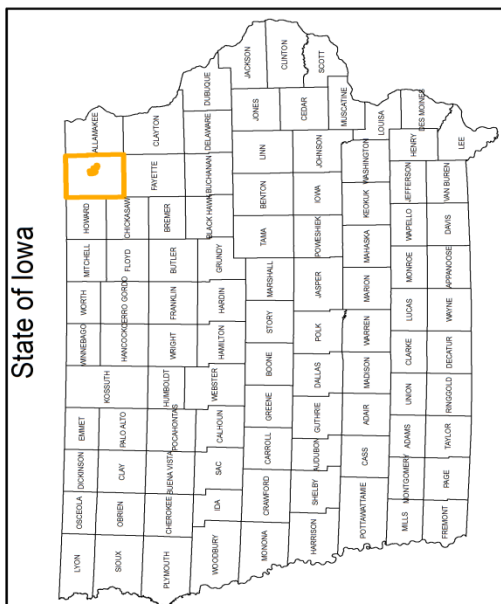
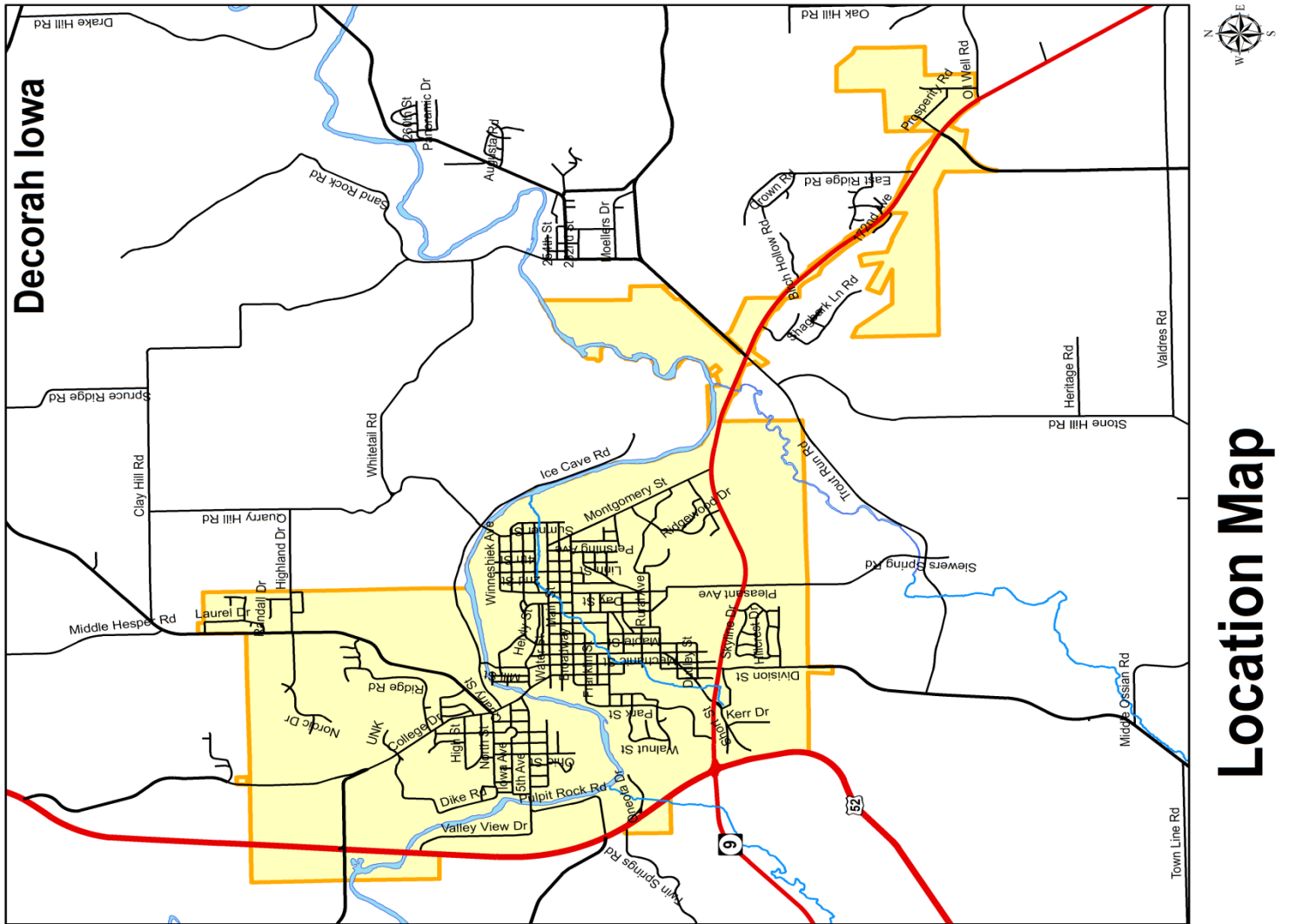


Figure 2: Location Map



CHAPTER 1: ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



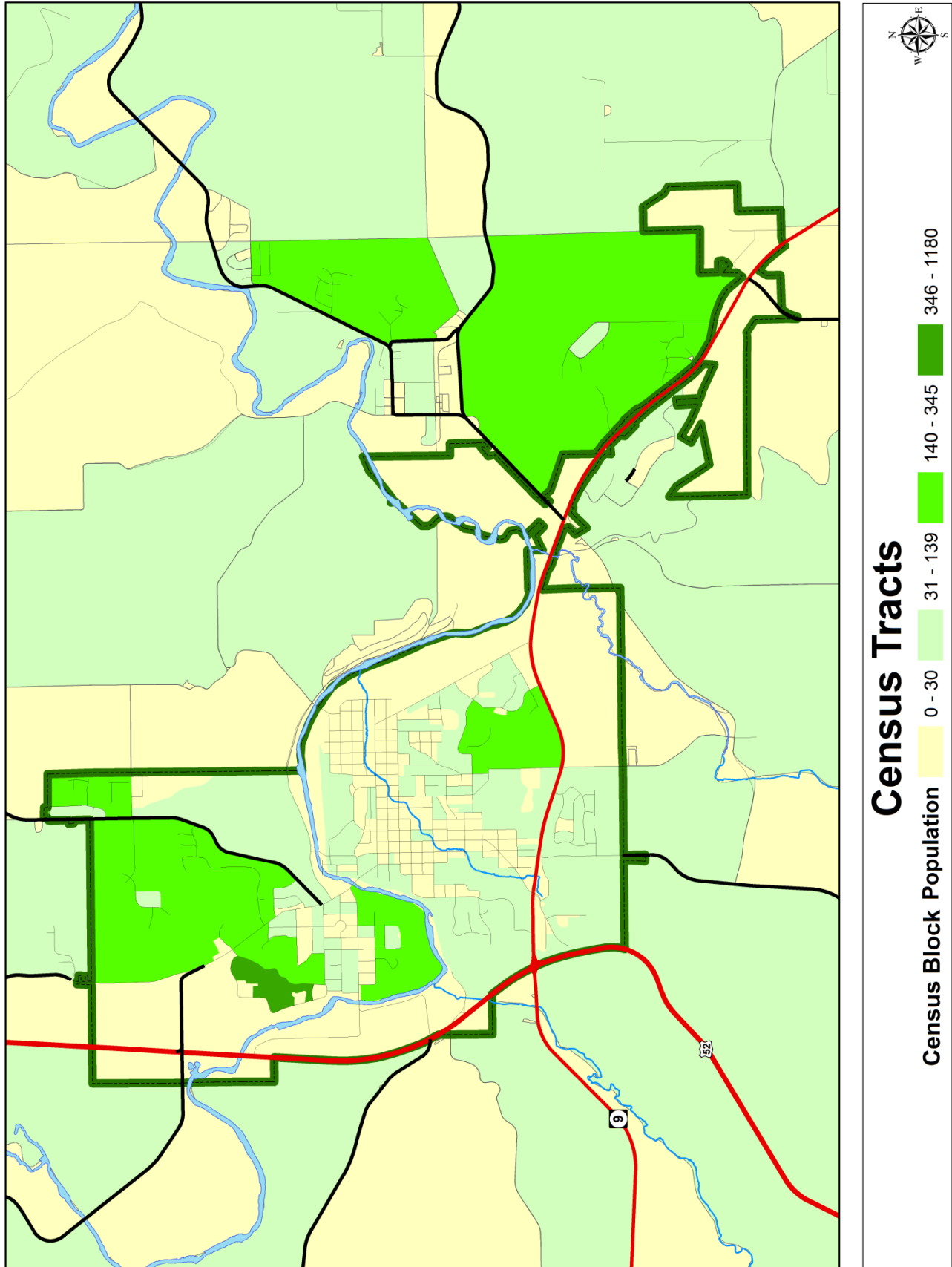
Photos above by Randy Uhl

1.1 Introduction

Development of Decorah's Comprehensive Plan begins with an overview of the community based on known information from the past to present and projections for the next 20 year planning horizon. This element gives an overview of demographic trends and background information including past, present, and future population; household and employment forecasts; demographic trends; age distribution; education and income levels; and employment characteristics.

All data prior to the year 2000 is from the U.S. Census, and some of the data after the year 2000 is also sourced from the Census. Recently the U.S. Census stopped using the long form and so the data available from the Census is less detailed than it was in the past. Therefore, we will transition to Community Survey Data which is compiled every 5 years and includes much of the data that had been on the long form of the Census. Community Survey Data is sample data and does not represent complete data for each household in the City of Decorah. Figure 3 shows the 2010 Census Tracts.

Figure 3: Census Tracts



1.2 Community Character

The City of Decorah exhibits a strong sense of place. The rugged limestone cliffs, abundant wildlife, clean streams and natural landscapes all add up to a scenic beauty that attracts many people who enjoy outdoor recreation, both passive and active. Another strong asset is the downtown business district, which showcases the vitality of the community and provides a gathering place that contributes to the city's identity. Decorah is home to varied architecture, and the eclectic mix adds visual interest and charm to the city. Other things that contribute to the character of Decorah are less tangible, like a strong work ethic, Norwegian heritage, and a close-knit community spirit. All these characteristics come together to define a community that is seen as a beautiful and healthy place to live, work, or visit.

1.3 Population Characteristics

The study of population within a Comprehensive Plan is important because it provides a statistical and historical profile of the community. This section of the Plan will provide a variety of information that describes demographic trends and projections compiled for the City of Decorah.

Population Trends

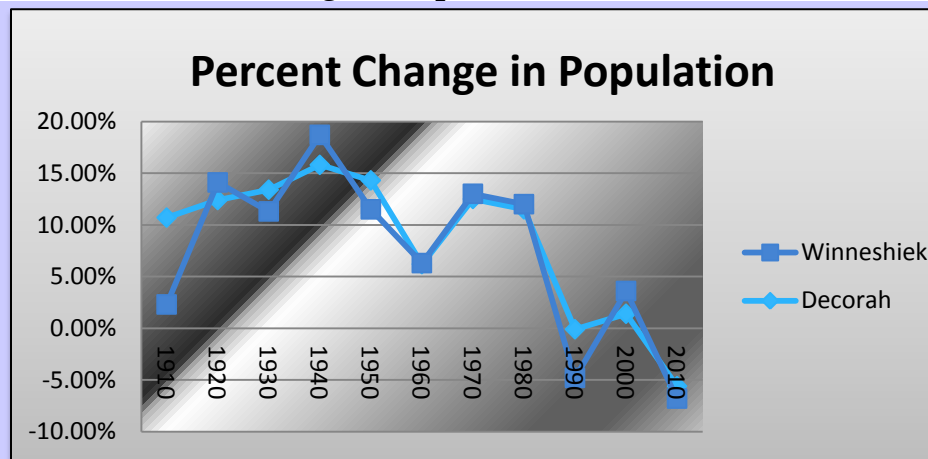
From 1900 to 1980, the City of Decorah's population had steadily risen. However, Decorah saw its population decrease in 1990 and 2010, and there was a minimal increase in 2000 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Historical Population Trends for the City of Decorah & Winneshiek County

Year	Decorah		Winneshiek County	
	Number	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change
1900	3,246	-	23,731	-
1910	3,592	10.70%	21,729	-8.40%
1920	4,039	12.40%	22,091	1.70%
1930	4,581	13.40%	21,630	-2.10%
1940	5,303	15.80%	22,263	2.90%
1950	6,060	14.30%	21,639	-2.80%
1960	6,435	6.20%	21,651	0.10%
1970	7,237	12.50%	21,758	0.50%
1980	8,068	11.50%	21,876	0.50%
1990	8,063	-0.10%	20,847	-4.70%
2000	8,172	1.40%	21,310	2.20%
2010	8,127	-5.6%	21,056	-1.20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Chart 1: Percent Change in Population



Source: US Census

The chart to the left demonstrates the population changes in Decorah as compared to the County. It is of interest to note that in the last 60 years the county and city almost mirror each other in fluctuation, which may infer that Decorah's population change dramatically affects the county's population.

Table 2 shows the population figures for all of the incorporated communities in Winneshiek County, as well as for the total county and the State of Iowa. In general, this table indicates that half of the jurisdictions declined between 1970 and 1980 while the other half increased; All of the jurisdictions including the county and state declined between 1980 and 1990; some of the jurisdictions including the county and state grew between 1990 and 2000; and between 2000 and 2010 only one community increased in population while the rest, including the county, lost population.

Table 2: Population Trends of Selected Communities

Community	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Calmar	1,053	1,053	1,026	1,058	978
Castalia	210	188	177	175	173
Decorah	7,237	8,068	8,063	8,172	8,127
Fort Atkinson	339	374	367	389	349
Jackson Junction	106	94	87	60	58
Ossian	847	829	810	853	845
Ridgeway	218	308	295	293	315
Spillville	361	415	387	386	367
Winneshiek County	21,758	21,876	20,847	21,310	21,056
State of Iowa	2,825,368	2,913,808	2,776,755	2,926,324	3,046,355

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 3 provides a detailed age breakdown of the city's population, as reported by the U.S. Census, and shows which age cohorts grew and which declined between 2000 and 2010. First, it is important to note that six cohorts increased and six cohorts decreased between the years shown. Second, the largest decrease was in the 35-44 age cohort, while the 55-64 age cohort experienced the greatest increase, both of which could be explained by the aging of the Baby Boomer generation. The largest age cohorts, 15-19 and 20-24, are a reflection of the impact Luther College has on the City of Decorah.

Table 3: Age Cohorts for the City of Decorah

Age Cohort (in years)	2000		2010		% Change
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	
Less than 5	284	3.5	306	3.8	7.7
5-9	298	3.6	334	4.1	12
10-14	361	4.4	318	3.9	-11.9
15-19	1,180	14.4	1,127	13.9	4.5
20-24	1,669	20.4	1,679	20.7	.6
25-34	640	7.8	632	7.7	-1.3
35-44	814	10.0	622	7.7	-23.6
45-54	830	10.2	765	9.4	-7.8
55-64	560	3.3	821	10.1	46.6
65-74	623	7.6	585	7.2	-6.1
75-84	580	7.1	572	7	-1.4
85+	333	4.1	366	4.5	9.9
Total	8,172	100.0	8,127	100.0	-5.5

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau