

# A Review of Smart Planning Principles

“It’s been a head-scratcher of a year watching the 85th General Assembly debate how to best govern Iowa. Removal of smart planning language from the Iowa Code was originally included in the Taxpayers First Act as a cost-cutting measure, but retaining smart planning language in the Code costs tax payers nothing. Not a cent. So 1000 Friends of Iowa breathed a sigh of relief when language that would have eliminated all references to smart planning from the Code, including the ten Smart Planning Principles and the thirteen comprehensive plan elements, was removed from the Taxpayers First Act.

Studies across the nation show many segments of society benefit from smart planning and smart growth - especially taxpayers. As of this printing, the legislature is still in session, but we are hoping they leave well enough alone and Section 18b will remain untouched in the Iowa Code. Historically, Iowa policymakers have had an aversion to embracing these common sense principles.

A review of the Smart Planning Principles in the Iowa Code leaves one wondering what about them is so threatening to warrant the attention received annually at the legislature. After all, cities and municipalities are simply asked to consider them when planning. They aren’t mandates to follow. The principles are listed below as written in the Code with a commentary following each.

**1. Collaboration.** *This encourages government, community, and individuals, even those outside the jurisdiction, to be involved during the planning*

*through the implementation of a project Government and public entities are encouraged to be in charge of facilitating the participation.*

Inviting everyone to the table, even those outside of city and county boundaries, to develop a plan will avoid many future problems and lend to collaboration, knowledge, sharing and avoid expensive pitfalls. Growth can create great places to live, work and play if it reflects a community’s own sense of how and where it wants to grow and realizes that a “community” (continued page 4)

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1000 Friends of Iowa is a statewide non-profit organization founded in 1998 based in Des Moines, Iowa.

1000 Friends of Iowa promotes responsible development that

- Conserves and protects our agricultural and natural resources
- Revitalizes our neighborhoods, towns and cities, and
- Improves the quality of life for future generations

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# Letter From the President

by Mary Ellen Miller



## More Women Farm Land Owners is a good thing!

“Women now own or co-own nearly half the farmland in Iowa, and an increasing number of them are sole owners who rent their farmland to a tenant,” says Leigh Adcock of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network.

Estimates indicate that half of Iowa farmland acres will change hands in the next 15 years as nearly 80% is owned by people over 55 years of age. One-third of those land owners are over 75 with nearly thirty percent over 65. Deaths and retirements will leave even more land in the hands of women, many not living on the land and with little agricultural experience.

These new land owners find themselves with many questions about land stewardship, soil and water conservation practices, cost-share options, tenant leases and sustainability concerns. My recent decision to leave urban life and move to an inherited small farm in southern Iowa, finds me included in this group of women landowners.

My adjustment to rural living comes at a time of intense scrutiny of modern agricultural practices along side a growing interest in “local” foods and niche farming. My new neighbors reflect the diversity occurring in our rural landscape. A widow leases her farm to a cattle rancher who lives in town. The corn field across the road, owned by a long-distance investor, is tended by a custom farmer who manages over 5,000 contracted row crop acres. The rolling hills surrounding my homestead are planted in switch grass and enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program by yet another long-distance land owner. I contemplate adding to this mix by planting edible food crops: nuts, berries, fruits, etc.

As I consider my options of what to do with my farm, I have attended many informational meetings and conferences offered by several organizations including WFAN, ISU Leopold Center, Iowa DNR, NRCS, RC&D, Wallace Center, Prairie Network, ISU Extension along with local Soil and Water Commissions and County Conservation Boards. I have learned how to write conservation leases, conduct soil tests, and prevent soil loss with no-till/terracing/grass waterways/ponds.

I am very much encouraged by the women farmland owners I have met along this journey. They reflect a strong conservation ethic and a keen interest in sustainable agriculture that will ensure the viability of our soils for future generations. They extol the value of land stewardship and I am honored to join their league.

## Linda's Line

Dear Friends,



Mark your calendars and join us for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Iowa Sustainable Planning Workshop June 28<sup>th</sup> at the Historic Hotel Pattee in Perry, Iowa! The theme this year is "Planning Iowa Sustainably – Building on What We Have". The day will include presentations and several breakout sessions. The Iowa Flood Center, DMAMPO, EPA, Iowa Department of Agriculture, ISU Extension, the Iowa Department of Public Health, and the Iowa Department of Economic Development will each be involved in the sessions. Session topics include:

- Smart planning for small cities
- Green infrastructure
- Aging implications
- Funding opportunities and strategies
- Regional planning

Additional details, registration information, and the agenda are available on the 1000 Friends website. Visit [www.1000friendsofiowa.org](http://www.1000friendsofiowa.org).

Recently, 1000 Friends of Iowa was notified the organization is the recipient of a planning grant through the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The project is the Iowa Immigrant and Refugee Farm Incubator Program. I assumed the lead investigator role in this project.

Finally, I resigned as the Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Iowa April 1, 2011. I appreciate the time I was able to serve as your Executive Director. My new role indirectly supports the mission of 1000 Friends by creating opportunities for new growers as well as potentially new income for the Iowa economy.

Thanks for all of your support!

Linda K. Gobberdiel, MA RD LD

## Study Tells Iowans—Don't Build More, Repair the Roads We Have

A new report from Smart Growth America and Taxpayers for Common Sense, "Repair Priorities: Transportation spending strategies to save taxpayer dollars and improve roads" examines road conditions and spending in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and the huge financial liabilities states are exposed to by disproportionately investing in expansion at the cost of regular repair.

***"According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, every \$1 spent to keep a road in good condition avoids \$6-14 needed later to rebuild the same road once it has deteriorated significantly."***

As a result of these spending decisions, road conditions in many states are getting worse and costs to repair these roads are rising faster than most states can address them.

***"53% of Iowa's roads have fallen out of good condition, and it would take approximately \$552,329,902 per year over the next twenty years to bring all of the state's roads into good repair and keep them that way. Despite this need, between 2004 and 2008 Iowa spent 36% of its highway capital funds on road expansion - \$190,243,738 - but only 32% on road repair and maintenance - \$171,769,836."***

Visit [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org) to read the full report and to view an interactive map detailing state by state statistics on road expenditures and conditions.

**Report:** <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/repair-priorities.pdf>

**Interactive Map:** <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/repair-priorities-map>

## Americans Want Smart Growth

Take heart, dear friends of smart growth! American attitudes and preferences for housing are shifting toward smarter, more cost-effective options, according to a recent scientific survey conducted by the National Association of Realtors.

While many Americans still prefer to live in detached single family homes, they also prefer living in neighborhoods that are pedestrian-friendly and within easy walking distance of school, parks, grocery stores and other amenities rather than in housing-only suburban neighborhoods that require driving for all activities and shopping trips. The survey also indicates that people are willing to live on smaller lots and in smaller homes if it would result in shorter commutes to work.

Another very positive finding, particularly in light of our work here at 1000 Friends of Iowa, is that nearly 60% of those surveyed prefer improving within, or redevelopment of, existing communities rather than building new development in the countryside.

Protecting farms and open areas from development were listed as an “extremely high” or “high” priority for 53% of respondents. With regard to transportation, improvement to public transportation options received the highest support (50%) as the best solution to traffic congestion, with only 18% listing support for “building more roads.”

It will be interesting to see how these preferences play out over the next decade as more baby boomers reach retirement age and want to downsize, but still remain active, and Gen Y graduates leave college with a heightened sense of environmental responsibility and a preference for living in walkable, urban neighborhoods where recreation, restaurants, and entertainment options are just a short stroll from their front door.

For more information about the survey visit (<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/2011/04/04/new-study-by-national-association-of-realtors-finds-consumers-want-smart-growth-amenities/>)

(continued from front page) doesn't just refer to citizens inside of a corporate boundary, but all who live nearby and are affected by decisions.

**2. Efficiency, transparency, and consistency.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should be undertaken to provide efficient, transparent, and consistent outcomes. Individuals, communities, regions, and governmental entities should share in the responsibility to promote the equitable distribution of development benefits and costs.*

Making development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective for taxpayers and the private sector will guarantee a successful project. With 948 cities in Iowa, adopting tax base sharing between neighboring communities could be far more lucrative than trying to outbid each other to retain industry or jobs.

There are also many ways to think of resource management. Leaving old buildings to deteriorate on the town square while providing tax incentives to build on the edge of town, is not responsible management of resources.

Leaders need to become cognizant of natural resources, and start treating them as natural capital. Iowa is very lucky to have timely rains. However, we have been consistently guilty of not infiltrating our rainwater as an asset to allow it to recharge our aquifers. It has been far more expedient to pipe the water to the nearest stream or river, which has led to flooding downstream. This mismanagement of water resources has been costly for taxpayers. From 2008 to 2010, HUD allocated more than \$642 million to Iowa because of flooding for flood mitigation. Dave Swenson, ISU Economist, found that close to \$2.4 billion in federal aid was spent in Iowa to restore households, assist businesses, repair or restore public facilities, or otherwise aid in the relief effort. An estimate of over \$10 billion was spent on flooding in 2008 alone.

**3. Clean, renewable, and efficient energy.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should be undertaken to promote clean and renewable energy use and increased energy efficiency.*

Americans are virtually oblivious to our 20 million barrel-a-day oil habit. The petroleum habit isn't sustainable, but we continue to increase our usage. Much of that energy waste comes from over cooling buildings, ill-designed buildings and commutes. LEED certification is intended to promote design and construction practices that increase profitability while reducing the negative environmental impacts of buildings and improving occupant health and well-being. Many Main Streets in Iowa already have well designed buildings built by our forefathers that just need to be refurbished to maximize efficiency. If we design our urban centers to attract residential development we could cut down on the suburban commute. By investing in a more balanced transportation system, we'll save land, make our cities more livable, improve air quality, and save money over the long haul.

**4. Occupational diversity.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should promote increased diversity of employment and business opportunities, promote access to education and training, expand entrepreneurial opportunities, and promote the establishment of businesses in locations near existing housing, infrastructure, and transportation.*

1000 Friends' Buy Local campaign strives to help Iowans understand the ways in which small businesses and healthy Main Streets encourage economic development. Locally owned businesses are often victims of commercial sprawl. Superstores tend to locate on large tracts of land on the edge of town. Research has shown that within five years of a superstore's opening, locally owned businesses in a 20 mile radius see an average decline of 19%. This doesn't just include the hardware store going out of business, but also the eye doctor and pharmacist.

**5. Revitalization.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should facilitate the revitalization of established town centers and neighborhoods by promoting development that conserves*

*land, protects historic resources, promotes pedestrian accessibility, and integrates different uses of property. Remediation and reuse of existing sites, structures, and infrastructure is preferred over new construction in undeveloped areas.*

Iowa has hundreds of beautiful small towns with unique squares and Main Streets. Yet nothing can kill Main Street like commercial sprawl on the edge of town. Most of the businesses that locate outside of town tend to be chains. As central cities and small towns are left behind for new development in the country, many historic buildings are abandoned. Relocating churches away from city centers and onto undeveloped farmland has been a trend in Iowa for the past decade. This causes them to be inaccessible to those who don't drive, young and old alike. Preserving a town's heritage gives the residents a sense of place and young people a place to come home to, not just visit.

**6. Housing diversity.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should encourage diversity in the types of available housing, support the rehabilitation of existing housing, and promote the location of housing near public transportation and employment centers.*

Diversity of housing including large, new, old, small, rental, multi-family and single-family encourages diversity of residents to include blue collar, white collar, stay at home, professional, young and old. This makes for a stronger and often safer neighborhood.

**7. Community character.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should promote activities and development that are consistent with the character and architectural style of the community and should respond to local values regarding the physical character of the community.*

As I travel the state of Iowa, I am amazed at the diversity and wealth within Iowa that we Iowans overlook as "nothing special". A strip mall could be anywhere in America. It does nothing to make your town unique. (continued page 6)

It's usually accessible by car and impossible for pedestrians to get to safely. The post card test is a good way to tell if you've built something that adds to your community's identity. If you can envision a building or natural area on a postcard, you know you have something that adds to the community character. Just flip through the Iowa tourism brochure and you won't see a single strip mall, sub division, or hog confinement—those are not the things that we want defining who we are.

**8. Natural resources and agricultural protection.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should emphasize protection, preservation, and restoration of natural resources, agricultural land, and cultural and historic landscapes, and should increase the availability of open spaces and recreational facilities.*

Iowa has the most altered landscape in the nation. As late as the 1860s, Iowa was 90–95% covered with prairie grasses with deep root systems that could soak up more than 5,000 gallons of water per hour helping to mitigate flood damage. Today, Iowa has lost 99% of its native prairie and wetlands.

Woodland is also affected by development. As habitat vanishes, wild animals become pests to drivers and suburban homeowners. Natural areas, widely used for hunting, fishing and other types of recreation, are no longer available. Many Iowans have no idea we live on world-class farmland or near a collection of prairie pot holes, a wetland or a virgin prairie. They don't know that the Iowa State Capitol sits on a ridge of the Bemis moraine, the southern boundary of the Des Moines Lobe of the Wisconsin glacier which blessed us with world class soils. We haven't been taught what a treasure we live in the midst of.

A 1998 Iowa State University study found Iowa loses 26,000 acres of prime farmland to urban development. Since 2006 Iowa developed 2.5 acres for every new person added to the population. (Source: USDA Natural Resources Inventory). This isn't sustainable or economically feasible for future generations.

**9. Sustainable design.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should promote de-*

*velopments, buildings, and infrastructure that utilize sustainable design and construction standards and conserve natural resources by reducing waste and pollution through efficient use of land, energy, water, air, and materials.*

Any plan that efficiently uses resources and is economically and environmentally sustainable is going to take some thought to design and plan. We need to stop building things with a pre-designed shelf life of 20-30 years. Our Great-grandfather's invested their hard earned money in buildings and designs that would last for our generation. We have not been good stewards of the infrastructure they left us. We need to strive to do a better job for future generations. Statewide, 50% of the land inside Iowa's 950 cities is zoned agricultural, while about 88% of the new growth happens outside cities.

**10. Transportation diversity.** *Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should promote expanded transportation options for residents of the community. Consideration should be given to transportation options that maximize mobility, reduce congestion, conserve fuel, and improve air quality.*

We have 978,000 acres or 114,225 miles of road in Iowa, and the DOT's expanding more and more all the time. Iowa has more public roads than all the interstates in all 50 states added together. There are approximately 39 miles of road for every 1,000 people in Iowa, giving a new meaning to the term "road hog". Roads are a tremendous tax burden. Every \$1 spent to keep a road in good condition avoids \$6-14 to rebuild the same road once it has deteriorated significantly. 53% of Iowa's roads have fallen out of good condition. Between 2004 and 2008 Iowa spent 36% of its highway capital funds on road expansion - \$190,243,738 - but only 32% on road repair and maintenance - \$171,769,836. We need to invest in alternative forms of travel. The transportation sector accounts for approximately 26 percent of energy used in Iowa. Passenger transportation can play a role in reducing the statewide consumption of fuel while maintaining the high level of mobility that is required to allow the state to retain its economic competitiveness. Please inform your legislators that Smart Planning laws are good for Iowa and Iowans.

# 2011 Membership Drive!

1000 Friends of Iowa is Member Supported. The organization could not operate without the generosity of people like you! We want to continue fighting the good fight, as well as bring you the Land Use Bulletin, Action Alerts and Public Policy Updates. If you enjoy our services and believe Iowa is a better place with our nonprofit work, please consider joining, renewing, donating a little extra, or giving a membership to that hard-to-buy-for-friend! today! Any size donation is helpful and appreciated.

## Why the Name 1000 Friends?

The first 1000 Friends organization was founded in Oregon over 35 years ago. Today there are dozens of similar organizations across the United States focused on growth issues. Many are members of a national coalition, Smart Growth America.

## Help Make Our Name a Reality!

The first 1000 members to contribute \$100 or more to show their support for our work will be recognized as Founding Friends. If 1000 Friends of Iowa had 1000 \$100 donors annually, an operating budget of \$100,000 per year would give us a solid position to continue to promote more responsible land use across Iowa. All who join or renew at the \$100 level or more will receive a 1000 Friends t-shirt (please indicate size)!

## Already a Member? Give the gift of 1000 Friends to a Friend!

We all know friends, family members, or colleagues who care about preservation of our land, natural resources and historic places. Would you like to give that person the gift of responsible land use? If you are interested in giving the gift of 1000 Friends, please visit our website, [www.1000friendsofiowa.org](http://www.1000friendsofiowa.org), or use the card enclosed to give a friend a gift membership to 1000 Friends of Iowa.

## Benefits of Membership

### Quarterly Newsletter

The Land Use Bulletin is full of news from across the state, the latest policy developments, and information to help your local advocacy.

### E-mail Communication and Updates on Facebook

Public Policy Updates, news items, Action Alerts and updates on Facebook

### Advice and Organizing Assistance

Training to form local groups and influence land use decisions.

### Share Your Land-Use News Statewide

We spread the word about local land-use issues, pass along lessons learned, and create networking opportunities.

# **SAVE THE DATE!**

## **Iowa Sustainable Planning Workshop PLANNING IOWA SUSTAINABLY BUILDING ON WHAT WE HAVE**

**June 28, 2011, Historic Hotel Pattee, Perry, IA**

**Join 1000 Friends of Iowa for the 2nd Annual Iowa Sustainable Planning Workshop  
“Planning Iowa Sustainably—Building on What We Have”**

Sessions will focus on:

- Smart Planning
- Green Infrastructure
- Aging Implications
- Funding Opportunities
- Regional Planning
- ... and more!

This event is sponsored by 1000 Friends of Iowa, in partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health, Rebuild Iowa Office, Transition Des Moines, Iowa League of Cities and the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. For more information contact Linda Gobberdiel, 1000 Friends of Iowa, at (515) 288-5364 or [gobberdiel@aol.com](mailto:gobberdiel@aol.com). Register online at: [www.1000friendsofiowa.org](http://www.1000friendsofiowa.org)