

V. Development Principles and Concepts

A Guide for Growth

The principles and concepts put forth in this section provide a detailed town plan for Fort Calhoun based on the goals and priorities identified through the community visioning process. The Fort Calhoun Plan is designed for and to adjust to growth. The plan recognizes that the community must take continued aggressive action over the next fifteen years to build on its history and past successes, attract new residents, and maintain and stabilize its population. Due to the probable growth of the City, the plan makes recommendations based on the assumption that this growth will occur. The plan also examines land use patterns in Fort Calhoun and develops a plan that will form the basis of a new land development ordinance.

Every community has unique qualities that make it distinctive and special. By taking an intrinsic look into these assets and developing from the strong points of the community, Fort Calhoun will have a stronger base to grow from without losing the unique community feel that the City has developed. By taking advantage of these unique qualities a community can grow stronger. If the City does not work to retain its unique character through regulating growth, it will lose the qualities that separate it as a desirable community.

In the plan's initial section, the demographic challenges facing the community were discussed in detail. Fort Calhoun has witnessed growth in the past decade in all but three of the age groups defined in this section. Two of the age groups with actual losses during the decade were in the 55 and over age groups, while the birth to 30 years of age groups all experienced modest gains. These factors combine with the general location of the City in relation to Omaha give the City a glimpse of probable future growth that should be taken into account when considering the future of Fort Calhoun.

Fort Calhoun is poised to take advantage of its numerous unique qualities. The City's past successful efforts in building a great community help to put it into a position to meet growth adequately and positively. Its proximity to the opportunities of Fort Atkinson and the Missouri River provide Fort Calhoun with the opportunity for increased tourism and a basis for new residential growth. The Community Design Concept is intended to build on this base, helping Fort Calhoun grow as both a living and working environment.

Patterns of Development

This section, then, considers the following physical features and patterns that give Fort Calhoun a distinctive environment:

- **Topography**
- **Downtown Fort Calhoun**
- **Parks**

It then presents a general philosophy for future community growth management, forming a Development Constitution that defines the general perspectives of the comprehensive plan.

Topography

Fort Calhoun rests at the foot of rolling hills formed along its western edge and on top of a bluff marking the Missouri River floodplain along its eastern edge. The relatively flat topography surrounding the City from the hills eastward is prime farmland. With the flattest land to the east of the original plat, growth has generally occurred in that direction, mainly in the form of single-family residential developments.

Although past growth has been generally east of the original plat, more recent developments have taken place in the hills to the west. The hills have started to entice growth due to the views and wooded areas that they provide.

Downtown Fort Calhoun

Fort Calhoun's town center remains the community's primary civic center. The businesses situated along the US Highway 75 corridor are a major part of the visible character of the City. The rural downtown atmosphere that is portrayed along the corridor is attractive to local residents and visitors alike. Retaining this image is important to the overall character of the City.

Parks

Fort Calhoun residents have excellent access to park and recreation facilities. Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, residing on the east side of the corporate limits, is the City's most notable landmark. This historical park attracts well over 40,000 visitors per year to the community, a figure that is increasing with each year. Fort Calhoun is also close to the DeSoto Bend and Boyer Chute wildlife areas.

Parks within Fort Calhoun include West Market Square Park, Pioneer Park, and the Lions Ballpark Complex. Each park has relatively new playground equipment that is more durable, requires less maintenance, and is overall safer than older park equipment found in many small cities like Fort Calhoun. Overall, the City has a strong, wide variety of recreational related features that help to provide a distinctive environment for development.

Challenges

The previous discussion has described features and relationships that over time have made Fort Calhoun distinctive. Yet, the forces that have changed town building and community development patterns in contemporary times also challenge Fort Calhoun's traditional character. These challenges include:

- **Fringe Development of Commercial Uses**
- **Transportation Routes and Land Use Patterns**
- **Regional Growth**

Each of these challenges requires a concerted response if Fort Calhoun hopes to fulfill its future development potential. Development without an eye toward these challenges will ultimately result in Fort Calhoun losing the character that makes it "Fort Calhoun".

Fringe Development of Commercial Uses

Possible future development along the Highway 75 corridor may threaten the economic stability of Downtown business. The Downtown will need to compete with possible commercial developments on the outer fringe of the City that are more accommodating to automobiles. While such development would create competition problems for the Downtown, it would also be an invitation to visitors to patronize different kinds of retailing along the corridor. The Downtown corridor must resist the desire to redefine itself when confronted with the challenge of new, larger-scale commercial developments along the fringe of the community.

Keeping the attractive character of the downtown while adjusting to fringe commercial development is essential.

Transportation Routes and Land Use Patterns

Highway access is both an asset and a challenge. U.S. Highway 75 is the primary regional north-south route through eastern Nebraska. It connects Fort Calhoun with Omaha to the south and Blair to the north. The Highway 75 corridor offers excellent opportunities for industrial and commercial development. This potential must be tempered with appropriate placement of intensive uses and utilization of land use regulatory tools in order to minimize negative effects on existing residential neighborhoods. This corridor has become the most visible environment of Fort Calhoun. It is imperative that it presents a positive image of the City.

While the highway is an important commercial corridor, it cannot divide the community. Increased traffic along the highway must be controlled appropriately to ensure that local vehicle and pedestrian traffic can traverse the lanes with relative ease. Increased traffic without proper controls can virtually split the City in half. The City should look for ways to continue development along this corridor while maintaining the safety and ease of use for the local population.

Regional Growth

Fort Calhoun will experience development pressure caused by three forces: local employment, population growth, and land availability. Fort Calhoun's population was relatively static prior to the 1990s, it then witnessed a notable jump to the most current estimate of 941 in 2004. Development had spread over that period of time from traditional sites within the City to outlying areas on the fringe.

In Fort Calhoun, these forces have pulled some new residential development to the northwest and away from the traditional city center. Acreage developments are also growing in popularity in the Fort Calhoun area, reflecting the desire for the rural setting of the surrounding region and offering rural lifestyles in reach of urban employment or amenities. Such developments can be collectively burdensome upon the tax base of the City in relation to the amount of services the City provides.

Rural residential development also creates conflicts with agricultural uses. This strife is highly evident in many locations where residential development lies alongside agricultural uses. Lack of communication and/or understanding prior to residential development in these areas provides most of the misunderstanding, as expectations of both rural uses are vastly different.

Between the scenic qualities of the valleys and vistas of the hills to the west of the City and its relative proximity to the Omaha metropolitan area, the rural lifestyle near Fort Calhoun is clearly a considerable attraction for those who move from and still expect the services of a municipality, placing heavy demands on local and county government.

Growth Through Annexation

As Fort Calhoun continues to grow the City will need to create opportunities for new development and reserve land necessary to carry out the goals of the future land use plan. To do this the City will need to annex adjacent territory and expand its extra-territorial jurisdiction. The City's annexation program should:

- Control Future Fringe Development. In order to allow the City to guide its growth and development more effectively, fringe development will need to be managed. Through annexation, a city can extend its zoning jurisdiction to adjacent areas and thus guide development in a direction that will provide safe and healthy environments.
- Protect and Enhance the City's Tax Base. Those living in fringe developments outside the corporate limits benefit from the City's parks and recreational facilities, streets, utilities, and other facilities and programs without equally contributing to the tax base.
- Increase Size and Population. An increase in the City's physical size and population can mean an increase in its level of political influence and attractiveness for commercial and industrial development. Annexation may force new development to occur in the City, and therefore increase jobs and the tax base. It may also increase the City's ability to attract grant assistance.

Annexation Process

Within a City of the Second Class, annexation can be initiated by the mayor or city council, as described in the following excerpt from the Nebraska Planning Handbook:

On the initiative of the mayor and city council or the chairperson and members of the board of trustees, second class cities and villages may also annex any contiguous or adjacent lands, lots, tracts, streets, or highways which are urban or suburban in character. One large exception to this power to annex territory is that such annexation cannot include agricultural lands which are rural in character. In defining what constitutes "adjacent" or "contiguous", the statute (*Neb. Rev. Stat. § 17-405.2*) states that contiguity may be present even though a stream, roadway, embankment, strip, or parcel of land not more than 500 feet wide lies between the targeted land and the corporate limits.

Source: Nebraska Planning and Zoning Handbook, First Edition, March 2002

The City must first adopt a resolution that establishes a plan for extending city services to the territory to be annexed. Including an estimated cost impact for providing services to the territory and description of how the City will finance the extension and maintain existing services.

Phased Annexation

Fort Calhoun should implement an annexation program that will create opportunities for new development and facilitate the goals of the future land use plan.

The Annexation Phasing Map illustrates those areas around the City of Fort Calhoun that should be considered for annexation. The areas are categorized into four phases based on the projected growth patterns and anticipated urgency for incorporation into the city. Phase One being the most urgent and Phase Four being the least urgent.

PHASE ONE. *Location and associated issues warrant the immediate consideration of annexation.*

PHASE TWO. *Opportunities exist to warrant future consideration of annexation within the fifteen year life of the Fort Calhoun Plan.*

PHASE THREE. *These areas are situated beyond the expected initial growth areas of the city. Conditions exist that may bring about the need for annexation of these areas. However, annexation will not be necessary until after Phases 1 and 2 are completed.*

PHASE FOUR. *These areas are situated beyond the expected growth areas of the city. Annexation will not be necessary due to community growth, as defined in the Fort Calhoun Plan. However, as development potential increases within the one-mile jurisdiction, annexation may become necessary. New development, the expansion of Fort Calhoun's population and degree of political influence, and in order to address the needs and wishes of existing inhabitants are possible justification for annexation within this area.*

Fort Calhoun and Washington County should continue to jointly regulate land development for the good of the region. Through this planning process the City and County can work together to determine those areas that will likely be annexed into the city in the future and those areas that will remain under county jurisdiction. Communication can ensure that future land use conflicts can be resolved in an effective and efficient manner.