

july 2025

ecia spotlight



DeWitt Comp Plan Complete

The last time the City of DeWitt updated their comprehensive plan was 2016. Thankfully, the City knew ECIA had the planning expertise to assist with this daunting process. Typically, a new comprehensive plan will help guide the community's future and present a vision with long-range recommendations for all activities that affect community growth and development. Topics usually addressed include housing, economic development, transportation, and several others.

Community engagement is a huge part of the plan process, and the primary contributors were the Steering Committee. Consisting of members appointed by the City, this committee met regularly throughout the planning process to serve as representatives for the broader community. Reflecting on their own experiences as well as what would be best for the city moving forward, the Steering Committee came up with the following vision statement:

DeWitt is a thriving, forward-looking city that prides itself on providing community members with the social, personal, and economic opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

The committee was also tasked with coming up with several goals:

- Maintain a safe community with small-town character.
- Foster the availability of quality, affordable housing options.
- Encourage availability of affordable childcare.
- Provide a well-maintained system of infrastructure, including streets, roads, bridges, water and sewer.
- Coordinate with DeWitt Chamber & Development Corporation to encourage business retention, expansion and recruitment.
- Work with educational partners to expand the availability of skilled, reliable workforce.
- Encourage the continuation of a variety of recreational opportunities.
- Foster an environment of community involvement.

Click on the picture below to see the newly adopted plan.

If your community is ready to update, or create a new comprehensive plan, contact Dan Fox, ECIA Senior Planner at 563.690.5752



Source: DeWitt Chamber & Development Company (photo appears in the plan)

Abandoned Industrial Site Transformed

With ECIA's brownfield redevelopment experience, an abandoned site is being revitalized into a functional and needed solution. Work is moving along on West Branch's Heritage Hill Development of 78 housing units, on the former Croell Redi-Mix site. This vacant brownfield was purchased by the City in 2016 and in 2018, 2019, and 2020 utilized \$72,760 of ECIA's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Assessment funds and an Iowa Department Natural Resources (IDNR) Derelict Building grant of \$50,890. The developer received Workforce Housing Credits for three phases of the project (78 housing units) totaling \$2.45 million. The developer has applied for an additional 27 units for the final phase. The City offered the developer a tax rebate of up to \$5 million for commercial development and up to \$4.5 million for residential development up to twenty years to support this multiphase project. The entire project consisting of 85-100 housing units plus commercial units is anticipated to be completed by 2026. Total project cost is anticipated to exceed \$21 million.

The housing development provides options between a 3 bed/2.5 bath townhome, a 2 bed/2.5 bath townhome, or a 2 bed/2 bath condominium. Thoughtfully designed, each unit features full stainless steel kitchens, walk in closets, in unit washer and dryer, and luxury vinyl plank flooring throughout the entire home. The development is located next to a beautiful park and the Hoover Nature trail.

To date, 54 units are fully completed and occupied with 24 more to be finished by fall of 2025. The address for the new development is 320 Historic Dr., West Branch, IA 52358. More information can be found at <https://www.apartments.com/heritage-hill-west-branch-ia/yec04dt/>.

If your community has an abandoned commercial property and is interested in the ECIA Brownfields program, call Dawn Danielson, at 563-580-1976.



Does your Public Works Person Need Support?

Public works staff everywhere are on the front lines facing the challenges of building and maintaining municipal infrastructure—they don't have the option of leaving a sewer line clogged, letting the water run from a broken water main, leaving the snow unplowed, or taking time off during an unprecedented storm.

The Iowa Public Works Service Bureau (PWSB) was established to provide information to improve the connectivity, knowledge, and efficiency of these essential workers by opening much-needed communication lines and fostering productive discussions among city staff.

How Can Cities Benefit from the Iowa PWSB?

Iowa PWSB staff possesses an in-depth understanding of the workings of public works departments. The Iowa PWSB helps Iowa cities in the following ways:

- Improves communication among public works staff across cities in Iowa, resulting in improved efficiency in operating and maintaining local infrastructure.
- Fosters dialogue between public works colleagues across the state who have experienced similar situations.
- Provides cities specific data about what is working for other cities in Iowa to help make informed decisions and develop policies.
- Produces tools to help cities compare their operations (e.g., street maintenance cost per mile) with others of similar populations.
- Offers a forum for cities to compare their public works policies (e.g., snowplowing, sidewalk inspection).
- Maintains a job board for city staff to post job opportunities directly with Iowa's public works groups.

Please visit the following website for more information and the informational flyer where the content for this article came from: <https://www.iowapwsb.org/about/>.

A Different Way to Acquire Abandoned Properties

In May, ECIA staff attended the 2025 Iowa League of Cities Nuisance Abatement Conference in Mason City and learned about the 657A.10b process; a legal pathway allowing cities to claim title to abandoned buildings. This session was about how a City can take its own action in acquiring a property within the city limits with the option to demolish but hopefully to revitalize it. This alternative mechanism bypasses typical demolition or nuisance-abatement procedures.

First, the residence must be abandoned for six consecutive months. The initial notice should be sent to the landowner's known address. Pinning or taping a notice on the front door or another visible location is OK too. The initial notice should indicate the building is unfit for occupancy and order vacation and should provide the list of deficiencies that apply to the City Code or specific ordinance. In the notice the City has to provide their intended purpose with the property and should have that in mind throughout the process. These initial steps start the clock on the six-month requirement for the property to be considered abandoned. During this time, the City should monitor the property by documenting activities and observations by starting a file. If the property changes hands, the clock keeps ticking on the six-month time frame. If a little work happens during this time frame, that won't but undermine the process, but the City should work with the titleholder, to the extent possible, to get the property up to code. It's good to show reasonable opportunity for compliance.

Below are next steps after the six-month time period:

- The City files a petition in the local district court, including the legal description.
- All property stakeholders (owners, mortgage holders, lienholders) must be named as respondents.
- Respondents are notified via personal service, certified mail, or, if unreachable, by posting, and newspaper publication.
- Notice must articulate how the city or county intends to use the acquired property.
- A minimum of 60 days must pass before the municipality can request a court hearing.
- Courts evaluate the following factors to determine abandonment
 - o Delinquent taxes or assessments
 - o Lack of utilities
 - o Vacancy
 - o Failure to meet housing/building codes
 - o Structural decay and exposure to elements
 - o Boarding-up or other security measures
 - o Vermin, debris, overgrowth
 - o Previous rehabilitation efforts by owner or municipality
 - o Compliance (or lack thereof) with code enforcement
 - o Any additional relevant evidence

If all parties either consent or fail to make a good-faith effort to comply within 60 days, the court can provide an alternative criteria in which the City may obtain title. If a tax sale holder is named, the notice, petition and a verified statement declaring the property identified in the petition contains an abandoned building should be provided to the county treasurer, at which time the county treasurer shall make an entry in the county system canceling the sale of the property and refund the purchase money to the tax sale certificate holder.

This article was reviewed and edited by Sam McMichael, Ahlers & Conney, P.C. If you have any questions about this process, contact your city attorney.



Sabula Catalyst Project - Open for Business

One fun fact about Sabula – it's Iowa's only island city, literally surrounded by the Mississippi River. Residents take great pride in the serenity, wildlife, and recreational opportunities that are afforded by the surrounding riverine and lake systems. The island has a beach, campground, a harbor with boat docks, boat storage sheds, and recently, a new business, Sip & Stitch, located at 415 Pearl St, Sabula.

ECIA staff worked with developers, Travis and Linsey Kieffer, and the City, to write a successful \$100,000 Community Catalyst Building Remediation grant in 2020 to restore and rehab this historic Ackerman building on Pearl St. The building, which was originally built in 1895, now has a business on the main level and two apartments, which were completed in 2023, on the second floor. One apartment is set up to be an Airbnb rental. The long-term apartment has been rented since Feb 2024 and the other apartment has been operating as an Airbnb since August of 2023.

Sip & Stitch opened this past April and offers visitors coffee, baked items, gifts, fabric, sewing and alterations, and craft classes. "When the renovation was close to completion we reached out to the community to find out what type of business they would like to see fill the space, many people said a coffee shop. It has always been a dream of mine to own a quilt shop so we joined the two together and Sip & Stitch was born! I have loved getting to know the crafters and coffee drinkers who stop in for a visit," said Linsey Kieffer, Owner and Operator. For more information, visit <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61572453577045>.



The Hometown Pride Vision Award Goes To...

...The City of Delaware Hometown Pride Committee! The City celebrated the 2025 Donald F. Lamberti Hometown Pride Vision Award on June 6th with representatives from the State's Keep Iowa Beautiful program in attendance.

Every year, Keep Iowa Beautiful recognizes individuals, businesses, communities, and organizations that shine when it comes to improving Iowa communities. Each year they select and honor one recipient for four different awards.

This award recognizes those who work to improve and enhance the quality of the state. Award winners embody a passion for building a higher level of pride through leadership.

The City of DeWitt was awarded this year as well. The Robert D. Ray Community Award for Excellence is given annually to a town or city for enhancing the beauty, cleanliness and attractiveness of the community. For a full list of awards, click [here](#)!



Pictured l-r: Lorin Ditzler, Debbie Palmersheim, Michele Evers, Tanya Burnett, Barb Ries, Katie Steffensmeier, Andy Frantz. Not pictured, Erin Learn and Ashley Fishler. Lorin and Andy are with Keep Iowa Beautiful and they presented the award to this Hometown Pride Committee.

Ideas Needed for Water Trail Plan

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is partnering with Delaware County Conservation and ECIA to develop a Water Trail Master Plan for the Maquoketa River from Bailey's Ford Park through Lake Delhi south to the County line.

Everyone is invited to learn about and share ideas for the draft Delaware County Water Trail during the community open house on Thursday, July 24, 2025, from 6:00 – 8:00 pm (short presentation at 6:30 pm) at the Delaware County Conservation Office/Nature Center in Bailey's Ford Park, 2379 Jefferson Road, Manchester, Iowa.

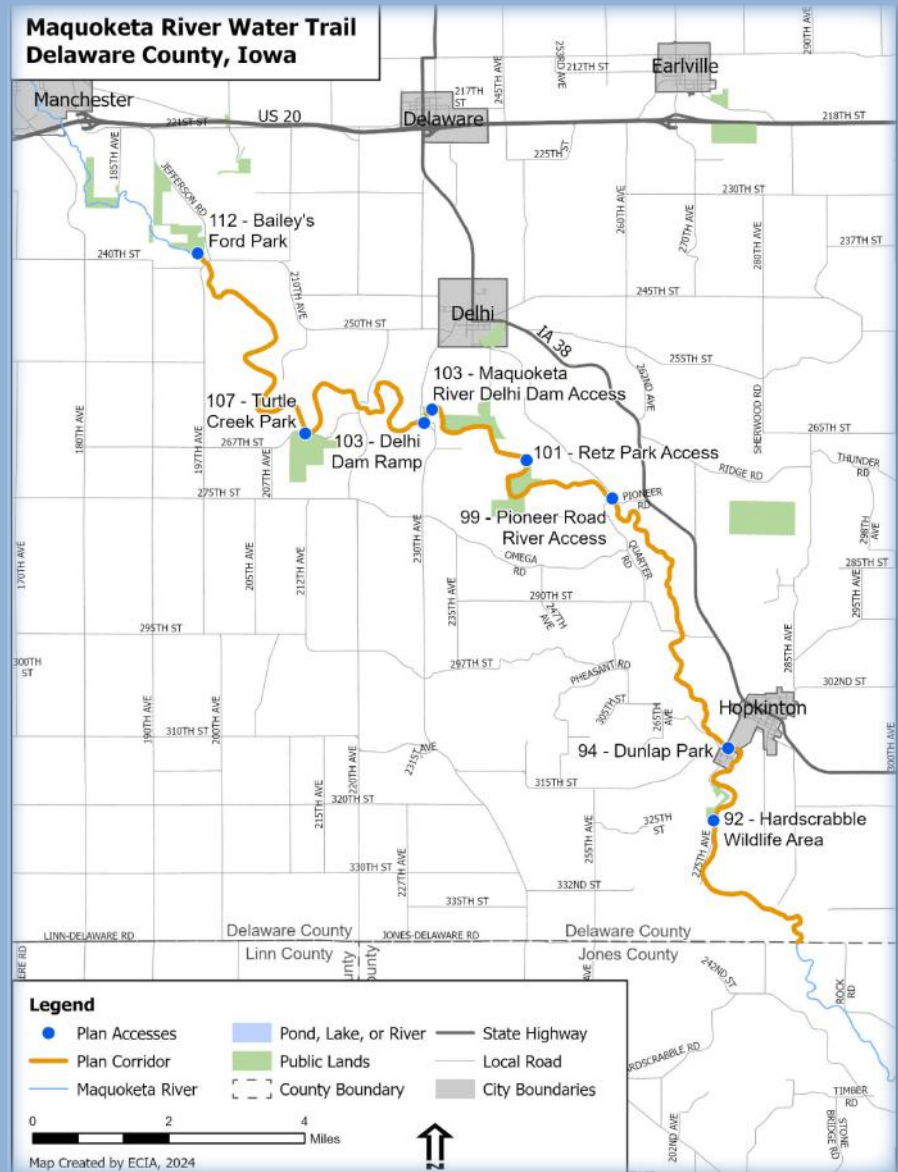
This is a great opportunity to review the draft plan and proposed projects, and to share input and help shape the future of water recreation and conservation in Delaware County.

Water trails are recreational routes on rivers and lakes that provide a unique experience for all types of river users including canoeists, kayakers, anglers, and motorized boat users. Water trail routes provide designated access points that can be used for planning trips at various lengths and difficulty levels. The Master Plan will present a vision for the future of river recreation in Delaware County and will recommend actions to achieve that vision.

Community input will help to enhance the river experience and identify improvement projects, such as: improved boat launch and ramp designs, informational signage, parking areas, safety, and general improvements to experiencing the natural resources of the Maquoketa River in Delaware County.

Ideas also can be shared using a short comment form available at the Delaware County Conservation Office and [online](#).

Please contact Delaware County Conservation for more information at 563-927-3410 or email delawarecccb@gmail.com.



Can Google Find your Park?

Have you ever done a Google search to find one of your little town's hidden gems, like your local park or restaurant? Do the directions Google Maps provides lead you there? If not, you are not alone, and ECIA can help. For assistance on suggesting edits to directions in Google Maps, contact Dylan Michels, ECIA Technology and Program Support Specialist, (563) 690-5751.

Goose Lake Receives \$500,000

Thanks to ECIA's grant writing assistance, Goose Lake was recently awarded a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the Iowa Economic Development Authority for its wastewater treatment facility improvement project. Other funding for the project comes from a \$500,000 Wastewater and Drinking Water Treatment Financial Assistance Program (WTFAP) grant, and the City matching the balance of the project with an SRF loan. Total project cost is \$2.3 million, as of now.

The improved three- cell controlled discharge lagoon system will not only serve the city more efficiently but will also be able to better support the 900 students and 170 staff who are a part of the Northeast Community School District. With all the funding in place, the project is slated to begin in 2026.

If your city has a critical facilities project, call Matt Specht, ECIA Director of Community and Economic Development, at 563-690-5721.

RAGBRAI in Delaware County!

ECIA staff recently learned that RAGBRAI will be going through a couple of Delaware County communities. RAGBRAI, the Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa, is the largest cycling tour in the world. The ride traverses Iowa west to east from the state line at the Missouri river to the border at the Mississippi River.

The 2025 route begins in Orange City on July 19th and ends in Guttenberg on July 26th and passthrough towns include Edgewood and Dundee. Dundee plans to welcome riders around 1:00 pm on the 26th by having food trucks, vendors, and the local bar/restaurant providing pizza and drink specials. Bicyclists roll into Edgewood around 2:00 pm that same day for brats on a stick, pie, ice cream, and cold beverages.

As of RAGBRAI LI in 2024, 474,103 riders have participated, covering 23,247 miles across Iowa. Inspired by RAGBRAI, over 200 similar rides have been established. The ride has grown into an international event, with participants coming from around the globe. Visit <https://ragbrai.com/route/> to see the full 2025 route.

ECIA Anniversaries in June and July



Debbie Maier
38 years

Michelle Huseman
37 years

Craig Elskamp
7 years

Christine Efferding
2 years

Jack Studier
2 years

Rebecca Kennedy
1 year

Kathy Hoffmann
1 year

Congratulations to these staff who recently celebrated work anniversaries. Your dedication and hard work in and for the ECIA region are truly appreciated. 88 combined years of service!

