



City of Dyersville
City Administrator's Office

March 27, 2026

Ms. Jenna Gilliam, AICP
Assistant Planner II
MSA Professional Services, Inc.
601 E. Locust Street, Suite 105
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

RE: Dubuque County Unified Development Code Update

Dear Ms. Gilliam,

Thank you for including the City of Dyersville in the stakeholder engagement process for the Dubuque County Unified Development Code update. I appreciate the opportunity to share the city's perspective on county development standards and their interaction with our city's planning and infrastructure. The following is a summary of my responses to the questions you provided in your email. I hope they are helpful as your team shapes this important document.

Question 1: Describe your role/connection to Dubuque County.

I'm Mick Michel, City Administrator for the City of Dyersville, Iowa, where I've served for 22 years in this role and 30 years in the profession. I'm responsible for managing city operations, administering the city's zoning ordinance under Chapter 165 of the Dyersville Code, coordinating capital infrastructure projects, and advising the Mayor and City Council on land use, finance, and development policies.

My connection to Dubuque County is ongoing and practical. Dyersville is partially in Dubuque County and partly in Delaware County, which means coordinating with county-level development standards is a regular part of my work. I primarily deal with the county's jurisdiction on issues such as fringe-area development, joint jurisdiction over subdivision plats, and projects that cross the city limits or are just outside them. I also observe the downstream effects of county land-use decisions on city infrastructure — especially utilities, stormwater, and roads — as development in the unincorporated fringe eventually seeks annexation or city services.



Question 2: How familiar are you with the County's current development-related ordinances?

My familiarity varies by topic. I have the strongest practical knowledge in subdivision standards, where my daily responsibilities most directly intersect with county jurisdiction. I regularly work with county subdivision requirements when assessing fringe-area development proposals and joint plats, which has helped me understand where city and county standards align and where they differ.

My knowledge of erosion control and stormwater management is solid at the project level—I collaborate with engineers on capital projects that require county and state permit coordination—but I wouldn't say I have deep expertise in the county's specific ordinance language. My understanding of private well regulations and wastewater disposal is more limited, since Dyersville operates municipal water and sewer systems, and those issues mainly come up for me at the edges of service area planning rather than in day-to-day administration.

Overall, I approach this process as a practitioner who works alongside county regulations rather than within them, which I believe gives me a valuable perspective on how the county's standards interact with municipal operations.

Question 3: Have you experienced any issues or confusion with any County development standards or requirements?

Yes, although I would describe my experience as coordination issues rather than confusion about the standards themselves. The area where I've faced the most difficulty is fringe area subdivision development—specifically, situations where a proposed subdivision is outside city limits but within our growth boundary, and the city and county are effectively making parallel decisions without a shared framework to guide them.

The main issue is that Dyersville has a Comprehensive Plan with designated growth areas and infrastructure investment priorities, but county subdivision standards don't always consider those municipal plans when reviewing development proposals on the outskirts. The result can be subdivisions approved at the county level with road, utility, and lot configurations that pose real challenges if and when the city is asked to annex that land or extend services to it. Addressing that disconnect early is one of the main goals I hope a UDC will tackle.

A secondary area is stormwater and drainage. County-level erosion control and stormwater requirements don't always align with how city infrastructure is designed to handle runoff, and development just outside city limits can cause downstream impacts within the city that we have limited ability to address afterward.

Question 4: Have you interacted with any development review processes?

Yes, primarily through platting and subdivision review. As City Administrator, I oversee Dyersville's zoning and subdivision ordinances, so I engage with development review processes daily on the city side. My experience with county-level processes most often occurs when a plat involves land near or adjacent to city limits, where both the city and county have a role in the review.

The experience has generally been workable, but the process would benefit from earlier, more organized coordination between the city and the county during the pre-application stage. By the time a plat reaches formal review, design choices have often already been made that are difficult or costly to change — such as lot sizes, street layouts, and utility easements. If the UDC could set a clear point for city notification and comments when development is proposed within the two-mile fringe area recognized under the Iowa Code, it would enable cities like Dyersville to provide input while there is still a genuine opportunity to influence the outcome. It would also help if the county and cities agreed on minimum development standards within that fringe area—standards that reflect both the county's land-use goals and the long-term infrastructure and service-delivery needs of the city that might someday annex and serve that land.

Regarding the process itself, clarity about submittal requirements and review timelines would benefit all parties. Predictability is important to developers and to municipalities planning infrastructure and service delivery around growth.

Question 5: What do you like about the County's current development-related ordinances?

From my perspective, what I value most about the county's current approach is that it sets a baseline framework for development in unincorporated areas that would otherwise lack standards. That baseline is important — it protects property values, manages land use conflicts, and provides at least a foundation for orderly growth in areas that may eventually become part of a city.

I also appreciate that the county has kept separate ordinances for different topics — zoning, subdivision, erosion control, and wastewater — which enables each area to be managed with the right level of detail. The UDC consolidation effort is a logical next step that should make those standards more accessible and consistent without losing that detail.

More broadly, I appreciate that Dubuque County is willing to undertake this comprehensive update. Unified development codes require a significant investment of time and resources, and their modernization—rather than just patching existing ordinances—demonstrates a commitment to good governance that I believe will benefit the county and its cities.

Question 6: What are the top three priorities you believe should be addressed in the UDC Update?

My top three priorities are based on my experience working at the intersection of city and county jurisdiction.

First, focus on fringe area development standards and municipal coordination. This is my top priority. The UDC should establish clear, enforceable standards for development within the two-mile fringe area recognized under Iowa Code, including a formal process for municipal notification and comment, and a framework for city-county agreements on minimum development standards in that zone. Growth occurring today in the unincorporated fringe will present a future challenge for city infrastructure and services. Getting the standards right from the beginning is far less costly than fixing them after annexation. A notable example is the Field of Dreams corridor along Dyersville East Road. This corridor has significant economic and community identity value, and its rural character is vulnerable to incremental development

pressures. A joint city-county agreement that clearly defines the corridor and limits development within it to protect its rural environment would be a meaningful, lasting outcome of this UDC process.

Second, stormwater and drainage management. Development in unincorporated areas has real downstream effects on municipal infrastructure. The UDC should set stormwater standards that consider the cumulative impacts on receiving systems — including city storm sewer and drainage infrastructure — not just on-site detention. A regional or watershed-based approach to stormwater management would benefit both the county and its cities more than a parcel-by-parcel standard.

Third, the document's consistency and usability are crucial. A UDC is only as effective as its ability to be understood and applied consistently by staff, developers, and elected officials. The consolidation of existing ordinances into a single, well-organized, plain-language document remains a key goal. Clear definitions, consistent terminology, and a logical structure will reduce confusion, speed up reviews, and build public confidence in the process.

Question 7: What goals or principles do you believe should guide the creation of the UDC Update?

Several principles come to mind that I believe should guide this work.

The first priority is fiscal responsibility. Developmental decisions made today have long-term cost impacts for both the county and its municipalities. The UDC should follow a principle that growth pays for itself — that new development creates enough tax base and infrastructure capacity to support the services it will eventually need. This means the code should discourage costly development patterns and encourage those that are efficient, contiguous, and well-connected to existing infrastructure. Also, fringe-area development should be kept to a minimum so that, when city limits border a developing area, developers can enter into pre-annexation agreements with the city prior to development. This pre-annexation agreement approach helps the city guide and control growth, ensure infrastructure is in place, and prevent long-term service and cost burdens from uncoordinated development just outside city limits.

The second focuses on preserving the rural character. Dubuque County's identity is rooted in its agricultural landscape, scenic corridors, and small-town communities. The UDC should demonstrate a deliberate commitment to protecting that character — not as an obstacle to growth, but as an asset that needs careful management. The Field of Dreams corridor is one example, but this principle applies broadly throughout the county.

The third is inter-county-municipal cooperation. The county does not operate in isolation from its cities. A UDC that is designed with municipal perspectives in mind — and that establishes formal mechanisms for city-county coordination — will lead to better outcomes for everyone. Growth that is well-coordinated across jurisdictions is more efficient, predictable, and equitable than growth that occurs in silos.

The fourth point is clarity and accessibility. A good development code should be understandable to the people it governs — property owners, developers, farmers, and citizens — not just to

attorneys and planners. Plain language, logical organization, and clear process descriptions should be non-negotiable standards for this document.

Question 8: Do you feel that the regulations in the County's current development-related ordinances are too lenient or too restrictive?

From my point of view as a city official, the county's current development rules are too relaxed in the areas most important to cities — especially fringe-area subdivision growth. The basic standards that apply in unincorporated regions don't fully consider the long-term costs of infrastructure and services that fringe development eventually imposes on cities. Lot sizes, road standards, utility easements, and stormwater management rules that might be fine in a purely rural setting become problematic when that land is later annexed and expected to operate as part of a city system.

I want to clarify that I'm not advocating for regulations that are unnecessarily burdensome on rural property owners or that hinder legitimate agricultural and rural residential uses. The issue is more specific than that. In the defined fringe area around municipalities, where the reasonable expectation is that land will eventually transition to urban use, the county's standards should reflect that path. Requiring development in that zone to meet standards closer to municipal expectations — road widths, utility stub-outs, lot configurations, stormwater design — would lower costs for everyone in the long run and make voluntary annexation a more attractive and seamless option for property owners.

Outside of the fringe area, I don't have a strong basis for characterizing the county's standards as too lenient or too restrictive, as that is outside my day-to-day experience.

Question 9: Are there specific areas in the County where you feel development regulations should be relaxed or tightened?

Yes, and my answer is consistent with what I've already described. There are two specific areas where I believe regulations should be tightened.

The first is the two-mile fringe area around Dyersville. As I've mentioned, this is the zone where county development decisions directly and permanently affect city infrastructure, service delivery, and fiscal health over the long term. Implementing tighter standards in this area — aligned as closely as possible with municipal expectations — would reduce future costs and encourage pre-annexation agreements and/or three-party development agreements. Doing this would lead to more orderly, efficient growth patterns.

The second is the Field of Dreams corridor along Dyersville East Road. This corridor holds significant economic, cultural, and community identity value that extends far beyond Dyersville's city limits. The rural nature of that approach contributes to the site's meaningfulness and is an irreplaceable asset for the region's tourism economy. I would support tighter, corridor-specific development standards in that area under county jurisdiction — restricting the type, scale, and intensity of development allowed — ideally through a joint city-county agreement that encourages shared responsibility for its protection. Any effort to establish those standards should include meaningful engagement with property owners along that corridor.

I am not in a position to speak confidently about areas of the county where regulations may be relaxed, as those areas are outside my regular experience. I would defer to property owners, farmers, and rural residents who work directly with those standards.

Question 10: What types of development would you like to see more of?

From Dyersville's viewpoint, the types of development I most want to see supported in the county are those that enhance and strengthen municipal growth rather than compete with or hinder it.

Housing is at the top of the list. Dyersville experiences a persistent housing shortage that limits workforce recruitment, business retention, and overall community vitality. I would like to see the UDC support planned residential development in areas adjacent to existing municipalities that are positioned for annexation, with standards that make that transition smooth and cost-effective. A variety of housing types — single-family, townhomes, and multi-family — is important to accommodate a wide range of income levels and household sizes.

I would also like to see the UDC support highway commercial and light industrial development in suitable corridors, especially near existing municipal infrastructure, where city utilities and services can be extended efficiently. That type of development generates tax revenue, supports jobs, and boosts the regional economy, benefiting both the county and its cities.

However, it is equally important that highway access for any such development be carefully considered to ensure that new entrances, intersections, and traffic patterns do not create safety hazards. Development that produces significant traffic should be required to demonstrate that access can be designed and located safely before approval is granted.

Finally, I would like to see conservation and open space development supported in areas of scenic, agricultural, or environmental significance — particularly in corridors where the rural landscape is itself an economic and community asset worth protecting.

Question 11: What changes or improvements are most needed for the County?

From my perspective, the most urgent improvements in the county fall into two categories — roads and utilities — both of which directly affect how development occurs and how municipalities provide services.

On roads, the condition and capacity of county roads in and around municipal growth areas are a significant concern. When development occurs in fringe areas, county roads often become the primary access routes for new residents and businesses before any municipal street connections are established. These roads need to be designed and maintained to standards that can safely and efficiently handle growth-related traffic. I would like to see the UDC include provisions that link development approvals in the fringe area to an assessment of the adequacy of county road access, including sight distance, intersection design, and load capacity.

Regarding utilities, extending water and sewer infrastructure is the most crucial factor in enabling organized and cost-effective growth. The UDC should promote development patterns that connect to municipal utility systems instead of relying indefinitely on private wells and

septic systems. Private systems have limited lifespans and pose long-term maintenance and environmental risks that can become public issues over time. Supporting development in areas where municipal utility extension is practical is both financially responsible and environmentally sound.

I would defer to the county conservation board, county staff, engineers, and rural residents regarding park and recreational facility needs, as those fall outside my primary area of expertise.

Question 12: Is there anything else you would like us to know?

A few additional items are worth sharing that haven't been fully covered in the preceding questions.

Dyersville adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2018 with a planning horizon extending to 2040. The plan identifies five priority growth areas — including the 2nd Avenue SE corridor, the Dyersville East Road area, the northwestern residential zone, the western area near Tegeler Pond, and the Highway 20 south corridor. Each of these areas has specific infrastructure, land use, and transportation expectations that county development decisions can either support or undermine. I encourage the county's UDC team to review municipal comprehensive plans during this process and consider how county development standards in the fringe can align with these locally adopted growth frameworks.

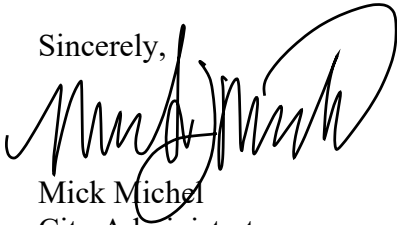
Housing diversity is a key priority in our Comprehensive Plan. Dyersville needs a wider variety of housing types to meet the needs of the workforce and an aging population. The UDC can support this goal by ensuring that development standards in fringe areas don't inadvertently enforce **single-family-only zoning**, which could limit choices when that land eventually becomes part of the urban area.

Dyersville adopted a Downtown Plan in 2018 that serves as a companion to the Comprehensive Plan. The Downtown Plan sets a long-term vision for the 1st Avenue corridor, the North Fork Maquoketa River, and the surrounding district. It emphasizes upper-story residential conversion, riverfront development, improved public gathering spaces, wayfinding enhancements, and building facade renovations. Development decisions along approach corridors into Dyersville — especially the Field of Dreams corridor along Dyersville East Road — directly influence whether visitors' initial impressions align with the quality and character outlined in the Downtown Plan.

Both plans are publicly available, and I am happy to share them directly if that would be helpful.

Thank you again for reaching out and giving the city an opportunity to participate in the process for this UDC update. I believe this effort will make a significant difference for Dubuque County and its cities. I look forward to our scheduled time to help clarify any responses to your questions. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any follow-up questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mick Michel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Mick Michel
City Administrator

CC: Honorable Mayor Jeff Jacque
City Council Members