

# *City of West Branch*

~A Heritage for Success~

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## **West Branch, Iowa**

# **Comprehensive Plan**

**Prepared by:**

**West Branch Planning and Zoning Commission, the West Branch City Council and the  
Residents and Community Members of West Branch, Iowa**

**with assistance from:**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The City of West Branch comprehensive provides the City a guide for the future. West Branch, with a population of 2,322, is located on the western border of Cedar County and eastern Johnson County in the State of Iowa. The comprehensive plan identifies issues and opportunities in such areas as land use, infrastructure, parks and recreation, economic development, and environmental resources. The comprehensive plan will also provide a road map for implementation which will combine the goals and objectives and found needs to achieve the shared community vision.

### *Purpose of the Plan*

The comprehensive planning process is designed to be a transparent public process in which citizens create a shared vision to promote the health, safety and prosperity of the community. A comprehensive plan has two fundamental purposes: First, provide a legal basis for land use regulations by analyzing existing conditions and developing growth goals. Second, present a unified and compelling vision for a community and establish the specific actions necessary to fulfill that vision. The recommendations of the plan are designed to take advantage of West Branch's unique location, resources and heritage to build an optimum future for the citizens of West Branch.

### Legal Role

Iowa Code 2003: Section 414.4 enables communities to plan. A municipality is empowered to plan future land uses within a 2-mile radius of their actual municipal boundaries. Where multiple municipal jurisdictions overlap, the authority is generally split at the half-way point between the municipal boundaries. However, municipalities often plan to the 2-mile radius limit even if there is an overlap. This is to indicate their desired land use pattern as a basis for boundary agreements, review of plans for unincorporated areas, and the reservation of public sites and open space corridors. If a city chooses to adopt zoning and subdivision ordinances, which recognize that people in a city live cooperatively and have certain responsibilities to coordinate and harmonize the uses of private property, the Iowa Code requires that these ordinances be in conformance with a comprehensive plan and its corresponding vision for the community's physical development. The West Branch Comprehensive Plan provides the legal basis for the city's authority to regulate land use and development.

### Community Vision

Comprehensive planning is important because it helps solve and avoid problems, meet the needs of the future, and realize new opportunities for the overall benefit of the entire community. A comprehensive plan helps achieve the community's vision of the future in accord with local priorities and resources. Many of the opportunities of the future may be beyond the current resources of the City or require conditions, which do not exist at the plan is created. Comprehensive planning provides the basis for shaping the decisions within the City's control and for reacting effectively as changes occur through external factors.

A complete comprehensive plan will provide the framework for both public and private decision makers to make choices where the end results that are in the best interest of the entire community. The foundation of the plan is based upon principals that make it valid regardless of the exact rate or extent of growth. Comprehensive planning can be vital in determining:

- The quality of life in the community;
- The character, health and accessibility of open space and natural resources;
- The degree to which storm water runoff is controlled from new development;
- The available revenues to support capital improvements and public services;
- The employment, housing, recreational and shopping needs of the community;
- The current and future demand on infrastructure and;
- The compatibility of new development, especially those that occur adjacent to existing or proposed residential land uses.

**Public Involvement:**

Public involvement is critical to building consensus in the planning process. If the full community is involved in the planning process the comprehensive plan is stronger in its applications. It is unrealistic that all ideas presented in the comprehensive plan will receive complete agreement. However, since the planning process was all inclusive and included a wide range of ideas and opinions, the comprehensive plan becomes the unifying element for decisions.

Public participation was sought through a variety of measures. First, a community wide comprehensive plan informational meeting was held on July 18, 2011. This meeting was designed to inform the planning and zoning commission as well as residents on what a comprehensive plan is and the importance of the comprehensive plan. A public input open house was held on October 12, 2011. It was designed so that participants could come and go; in hopes it would make it more convenient for participants and more input received. A community wide survey was conducted in late March and early April of 2012. Over 400 surveys were received. The survey results are in appendix a.

## Chapter 2: Vision Statement, Goals & Objectives

*Vision Statement for West Branch: Building upon our heritage as means to our success.*

The comprehensive plan goals will help guide the future development and growth within the planning boundaries of the City of West Branch. These goals and objectives are to be used for guidance for proposed development and redevelopment.

Goals are considered to be a series of guides to consistent and rational public and private decisions to be used in the development of our urban and rural lands. A goal is an ideal and expresses the real purpose that underlies the action. As such, it is expressed in abstract terms and deals with subjective values. It is open to a variety of interpretations and must be interpreted by one's own individual system of values.

Whereas goals are lofty and abstract, specific ends must be attained in order to reach these goals. These ends are called Objectives, and unlike goals, can be measured to a certain specificity or standard. The objective is either reached, or it is not; it is a matter of fact, not a matter of opinion. The objectives of the Plan take the form of Policy recommendations.

### Economic Development

Concentrate on retaining and expanding existing local business.

- i. Cooperate with business, educational institutions, community organizations, and government to provide information to local businesses.
- ii. Promote assistance to local firms in finding appropriate development sites for expansion.
- iii. Promote retaining existing manufacturing firms and facilitate their expansion.
- iv. Encourage downtown revitalization and business development.
- v. Encourage diversified retail shopping.

Increase the number of small firms by fostering local entrepreneurship.

- i. Cooperate with other agencies and institutions to identify programs and services to assist in the creation of new small business.
- ii. Promote support for start-up businesses with both financial and technical assistance.

### Housing

Promote the preservation, rehabilitation and investment in our city housing stock and neighborhoods.

- i. Encourage a range of affordable, accessible, and decent, safe and sanitary rental housing options throughout the city.
- ii. Promote programs to improve energy efficiency and enlist the participation of utility companies in promotional efforts.

- iii. Promote recycling existing, vacant or under-utilized structures, such as schools, industrial building, into housing with an affordable component, where appropriate.

Improve housing opportunities.

- i. Provide for a variety of housing types, costs and locations.
- ii. Become more aggressive in attracting new residents to live in West Branch.

Public Infrastructure and Service

Provide, maintain, and improve solid waste collection and disposal infrastructure and services.

- i. Strive to maintain the efficient and effectiveness of solid waste collection system.
- ii. Strive to establish yard waste collection.

Provide, maintain, and improve a cost-effective, safe and functional surface transportation system.

- i. Support ongoing street reconstruction, rehabilitation, and maintenance overlay programs, ensuring the timely maintenance, repair and reconstruction of the city's streets and bridges.
- ii. Seek alternative funding sources for construction and maintenance.
- iii. Support extending the life and improve the quality of the city street system through preventative maintenance programs.
- iv. Coordinate with state, county, and other cities for surface transportation system improvements and maintenance.

Provide, maintain and improve a safe and functional storm sewer system.

- i. Support maintaining the integrity of the storm sewer system.
- ii. Strive to meet all local, state and federal regulations.
- iii. Identify existing and potential flood prone problem areas, and alleviate with appropriate mitigation strategies, where possible.

Provide, maintain and improve cost-effective, functional and self-supporting sanitary sewer and water pollution control systems.

- i. Support maintaining the integrity of the sanitary sewer system.
- ii. Encourage efficient operation of the Water Pollution Control Plan and sanitary sewer system.
- iii. Strive to meet all local, state and federal water quality standards.

Provide, maintain and improve cost-effective, functional and self-supporting water system.

- i. Support maintaining the integrity of the water system.
- ii. Encourage efficient operation of the water system.
- iii. Strive to meet all local, state and federal water quality standards.
- iv. Strive to improve the taste of water.
- v. Strive to maintain reasonable level of hardness of the water.

Provide, maintain and improve safe and efficient movement on the City's street system.

- i. Support the continuing street construction program, providing for timely maintenance, repair and reconstruction of streets.
- ii. Encourage the implementation of safety principles and practices in the area of street lighting, street layout, speed limits, street signage, street pavement striping and traffic signals.
- iii. Support maintaining the streets system's continuity and safety.

Promote cost-effective emergency services and facilities that enhance and protect the lives of residents

- i. Promote cooperation and coordination among emergency services agencies
- ii. Support provisions of responsive, high quality emergency services
- iii. Encourage private-public partnerships where possible

Provide public facilities and services at levels which support a "desirable quality of life" for current and future residents.

- i. Provide facilities and services in locations compatible with planned uses, populations and needs.
- ii. Encourage new development to locate where existing infrastructure is already in place.

Promote the creation and adoption of a complete streets policy.

#### Administration

Promote the fiscal soundness and viability of City government operations.

- Consider using nonrecurring revenues only to fund nonrecurring expenditures.
- Monitor changing conditions, trends and legislation appropriate to the City's fiscal position and promote the City's sound fiscal condition.
- Identify and evaluate revenue alternatives to City property tax.
- Minimize program costs by using sound purchasing practices.
- Maintain adequate reserves to positively impact bond rating and provide flexibility to implement projects as opportunities come up.
- Use City Council goals and priorities to guide the budgeting process.

Operate municipal facilities and services in an accountable manner and encourage positive public relations with residents and other organizations.

- i. Maintain and review administrative, management and personnel capacity for effective support and implementation of municipal services.
- ii. Pursue a variety of revenue sources to offset flat line budgets as well as examine ways to reduce costs and increase fund balances for municipal facilities and services.

Provide adequately developed park areas and continue to develop a pedestrian/bicycle trail system that links the parks, historical, and natural resources of the City while providing opportunities for recreational activities.

## Land Use and Zoning

Encourage redevelopment opportunities to revitalize unused property

- i. Encourage redevelopment or adaptive reuse of vacant or underutilized buildings and sites
- ii. Promote infill development
- iii. Promote affordable commercial space for small start-up, new or growing businesses
- iv. Encourage reinvestment in our existing neighborhoods (i.e., smart growth)
- v. Consider incentives for smart growth

Encourage cooperative effort between the City of West Branch, Cedar County, Johnson County and any other bodies or agencies involved with the planning, administration or enforcement of plans, codes, ordinances, regulations, etc., that are in effect in the West Branch area.

### Chapter 3: Smart Planning

The “Iowa Smart Planning Act” was signed into law in the spring to 2010, as a way to guide and encourage the development of local comprehensive plans. The bill articulates 10 Smart Planning Principles and 13 comprehensive plan elements for application in local comprehensive plan development and public decision making. These guidelines are intended to improve economic opportunities, preserve the natural environment, protect quality of life and ensure equitable decision-making processes.

The 10 Smart Planning Principles are as follows:

- **Collaboration:** The comprehensive plan should have a proactive strategy to gain public participation from governmental, community and individual stakeholders, including those outside the jurisdiction in planning, zoning, development and, resource management deliberations, decision making and implementation processes.
- **Efficiency, Transparency and Consistency:** The comprehensive planning process should be transparent. The decision making process should follow clearly defined standards, be consistent and documented.
- **Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy:** Efforts to incorporate clean, renewable and efficient principals into design standards, ordinances and policies should be looked at and addressed in the comprehensive plan.
- **Occupational Diversity:** Planning, zoning and development should promote increased diversity of employment, business opportunities, access to education and training, expanded entrepreneurial opportunities.
- **Revitalization:** Facilitate the redevelopment and or reuse of established town centers and neighborhoods by promoting development that conserves land, protects historic resources, promotes pedestrian accessibility and integrated mixed uses of properties. Redevelopment and reuse of existing sites, structures and infrastructure is preferred over new construction in under developed areas.

- Housing Diversity: Promote a multitude of housing types, styles, and price ranges. Look at areas where rehabilitation might be a good fit and identify new housing developments close to existing transportation and employment centers.
- Community Character: Identify the characteristics that make the city what it is. Then develop a strategy to promote activities and development that are consistent with the character and architectural style of the community.
- Natural Resources & Agricultural Protection: Emphasize the protection, preservation and restoration of natural resources, agricultural land, cultural and historic landscapes while also looking to increase the availability of open spaces.
- Sustainable Design: Promote developments, buildings and infrastructure that utilize green design and construction practices with the goal of conserving natural resources by reducing waste and pollution through efficient use of land, water, air, and energy.
- Transportation Diversity: Promote expanded transportation options for residents of the community. Consideration should be given to transportation options and development that maximize mobility, reduce congestion, conserve fuel and improve air quality.

The 13 Comprehensive Planning Elements are as follows:

- Public Participation:
- Issues and Opportunities
- Land Use
- Housing
- Public Infrastructure and Utilities
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Agricultural and Natural Resources
- Community Facilities
- Community Character:
- Hazards
- Intergovernmental Collaboration
- Implementation

## Chapter 6 Housing

Housing is the dominant form of development in West Branch. A significant amount of West Branch's 2032 Land Use Plan is earmarked for residential uses. The housing supply plays an important role in shaping the community. To a large degree, the size, form and type of housing units determines who lives in West Branch. The quality and character of West Branch's neighborhoods plays an important role in shaping the identity of the community and its stature as a place to live.

Including housing policies and initiatives in the comprehensive plan is appropriate for two reasons. First, the housing needs of a community are not completely met by private market forces, land use planning and land use controls. Community plans and ordinance controls create the framework for private land development; land development that is almost universally profit-driven. Private market forces need to be supplemented by programs and funding sources that bridge the financial gaps of providing housing for segments of the community that can't afford market-rate housing. Accordingly, this chapter can help identify housing needs and provide a foundation for local decision making to guide residential development and redevelopment efforts in West Branch.

The second reason that housing is addressed in this plan is to meet the intent of recent Iowa Smart Planning legislation enacted by the Iowa Legislature. The Smart Planning legislation defines components that are suggested content for comprehensive plans. These components are presented as ten Smart Planning principles, one of which addresses housing. The housing principle addresses housing diversity. It states, "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."

The legislation further states that when developing or amending a comprehensive plan, "objectives, policies and programs to further the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods and new residential neighborhoods and plans to ensure an adequate supply of housing that meets both the existing and forecasted housing demand. The comprehensive plan or land development regulations may include an inventory and analysis of the local housing stock and may include specific information such as age, condition, type, market value, occupancy, and historical characteristics of all the housing within the municipality. The comprehensive plan or land development regulations may identify specific policies and programs that promote the development of new housing and maintenance or rehabilitation of existing housing that provide a range of housing choices that meet the needs of the residents of the municipality."

## Characteristics of the Existing Housing Supply

### Assessed Value

Table 6.1 shows the assessed value of residential properties in West Branch according to 2012 Cedar County Assessors data. (NEED JOHNSON COUNTY) Over 75% of West Branch’s housing has an assessed value between \$75,000 and \$200,000. In most cases, the assessed value of a given home closely correlates to its age of construction. Residential units lying to the west, in Johnson County and in the newer subdivisions in the Cedar County side of West Branch have generally higher assessed values than properties lying in downtown and older areas of the City. Residential units with the highest assessed value are concentrated .....

Assessed Value	# of Units	Percent
< \$75,000	56	8.0
\$75,000 - \$99,999	141	20.1
\$100,000 - \$149,999	228	32.5
\$150,000 - \$199,999	168	24.0
\$200,000 - \$249,999	72	10.3
\$250,000 - \$299,999	24	3.4
> \$300,000	12	1.7

### Year Built

West Branch’s housing stock is relatively new with almost 75% of the total units being less than 50 years old, constructed since 1960 (see Table X.X). Over ¼ of the City’s housing stock was built prior to 1960 with the majority of those, 18.2%, being built before 1940. Homes constructed prior to 1960 will require increasing amounts of ongoing maintenance. The city will need to continually monitor overall housing quality to ensure the long-term integrity of its older neighborhood areas.

From 2000 to 2012, much, but not all, of West Branch’s new housing growth has occurred on the west side of town. This area is closer to Iowa City, making a shorter commute for citizens who work outside the City to the west but desire to reside in West Branch.

Figure X.X shows the distribution of housing units in the community by year of construction.

Year Built	# of Units	Percent
< 1940	197	18.2
1940 – 1949	30	2.8
1950 – 1959	58	5.4
1960 – 1969	118	10.9
1970 – 1979	203	18.8
1980 – 1989	125	11.6
1990 – 1999	186	17.2
> 2000	163	15.1

**Housing Types and Availability**

The availability of affordable, quality housing is an important factor in a community’s ability to maintain, expand, or develop a healthy economy. The availability of housing can be an important location factor for new industries when considering a community. A community that is better prepared to meet these needs may have an edge in attracting new development, along with retaining current residents. Housing must be made available for the low-to-moderate income households, the first-time home buyer, residents looking to upgrade homes within the community, and for those looking to move to or retire in the community.

Table 5 provides an inventory of the types of housing located in West Branch, Cedar and Johnson Counties, and the state of Iowa. Owner-occupied housing is by far the dominant form of housing within West Branch accounting for 77.6% of the total. This is consistent with Cedar County and the state of Iowa. The higher percentages of owner-occupied housing tends to be an indication of a traditional county, which is expected in a more rural area. The lower percentage in Johnson County is attributed to the high demand for rental units with the transient university student population. A 4.3% vacancy rate within West Branch was experienced in 2010. This is slightly lower than expected and may be even lower as homes for sale and rental units that have been rented but were vacant at the time of the census were included in this figure. West Branch is lower than the 5% the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers to be a normal vacancy rate. This vacancy rate may be the result of the traditional nature of residents, or the poor economy experienced in recent years and many households refinancing or households being hesitant to not move up in poor economic times.

**TABLE 6.3 - Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Housing Units**

	Owner-occupied		Renter-occupied		Vacant	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>West Branch</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>77.6%</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>4.3%</b>
<b>Cedar County</b>	<b>5,903</b>	<b>78.6%</b>	<b>1,608</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>6.9%</b>
<b>Johnson County</b>	<b>31,299</b>	<b>59.4%</b>	<b>21,416</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	<b>3,252</b>	<b>5.8%</b>
<b>State of Iowa</b>	<b>880,635</b>	<b>72.1%</b>	<b>340,941</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>114,841</b>	<b>8.6%</b>

Table 6.4 shows the breakdown of housing units in West Branch. HUD believes that a city should have a 5% vacancy rate, that is 5% of a community’s housing units are available for sale or rent, as a standard. One would assume that the 5% split would reflect the percent of owner occupied housing versus rental units in the community. (If a community has 77% of its homes classified as owner-occupied and 23% rental units, one would assume that 77% of the available units are owner occupied units for sale and 23% are rental units for rent.) The census shows that West Branch has 990 housing units. (The number is higher in 2012 due to additional units being constructed since the time of the census.) Based on the HUD standard, West Branch should have 49 units available. Of the 49 units, 38 would be available for sale and 11 would be available for rent. The 2010 census shows 14 units available for rent, which is within a reasonable range of expectation. However, the 8 units for sale is much lower than expected. *The lack of houses for sale indicates a potential need for additional homes in the communities.*

TABLE 6.4 - STATUS OF HOUSING UNITS						
	Owner	Renter	For Sale	For Rent	Seasonal	Other Vacant
West Branch	735 77.6%	212 22.4%	8 0.8%	14 1.4%	3 0.3%	18 1.9%
Cedar County	5,903 78.6%	1,608 21.4%	99 1.2%	95 1.2%	47 0.6%	312 3.8%
Johnson County	31,299 59.4%	21,416 40.6%	810 1.4%	1,173 2.1%	327 0.6%	942 1.7%
State of Iowa	880,635 72.1%	340,941 27.9%	18,405 1.4%	31,812 2.4%	21,020 1.6%	43,604 3.2%

Source: 2010 Census

Table 6.5 details the property sales in West Branch (CEDAR COUNTY ONLY AT PRESENT). The vast majority of all property sales in West Branch within the Cedar County part of the City (91.2%) were less than \$200,000 with a high percent of 35% of the sales being less than \$100,000. This further confirms prior data that the majority of the existing homes with lower values are in the Cedar County part of the City. The lack of sales above \$250,000 indicates few of these sales were new construction as the majority of homes built today sell for \$200,000+. The significant percent of homes sold under \$100,000 likely indicates older, existing homes that are being sold and may further indicate the City's need to monitor housing quality to ensure the long-term integrity of its older neighborhood areas as previously noted.

TABLE 6.5 - WEST BRANCH DEED TRANSFERS IN 2011 (CEDAR COUNTY ONLY)								
Total Sales	Lots	\$0	\$75,000	\$100,000	\$150,000	\$200,000	\$250,000	> \$300,000
		-	-	-	-	-	-	
		\$74,999	\$99,999	\$149,999	\$199,999	\$249,999	\$299,000	
34	0	8	4	9	10	3	0	0
	N/A	23.5%	11.8%	26.5%	29.4%	8.8%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: Cedar County Assessor

In community survey conducted for the comprehensive planning process, housing was an issue of concern to residents, but not a major concern. The issues of highest importance were focused on property maintenance and lack of senior housing availability. Other areas of less concern included high purchase prices, lack of choice in moderate price ranges, and lack of affordable housing. These issues form the basis for the housing plan.

Traditional single-family detached housing has always been a strong component of the community's housing stock. Development in West Branch over the past ten years has been varied. The moderately priced housing units tend to be zero lot line, single-family attached units. The balance tends to be higher priced single-family detached units ranging from the upper \$100's to \$400,000. As the community looks forward to the next two decades, this

comprehensive plan assumes that efforts will be made to maintain housing diversity. Future housing constructed in West Branch will either occur as infill housing in the developed portion of the community or new housing in the developing, west area of the city. In infill situations, housing types will need to be compatible with surrounding housing types and lot sizes. In the developing area, more flexibility exists. The land use pattern in the community promotes housing diversity. However, it may require some effort on the part of the City to promote moderately priced single-family detached housing.

#### **A Community of Well Maintained Housing**

An analysis of the age of West Branch's housing stock revealed that a significant portion of the housing in the community was built before 1960. Homes that are over 50 years old tend to require more maintenance. The Comprehensive Plan surveys noted concerns about property maintenance. It is possible that some deteriorating housing units may be located in prominent locations. Such properties sometimes deteriorate and negatively impact the image of the community. In some cases, owners of property sometimes defer required maintenance due to a lack of funds or other reasons. The City may consider implementing a property maintenance code and applying for grant funding to assist grant-eligible property owners. Efforts should also concentrate on property maintenance in all areas of the City. Neighborhood deterioration due to abandoned vehicles, peeling paint, junk storage, etc. can be addressed in these property maintenance standards.

#### **Housing Development that Respects the Natural Environment**

The City of West Branch has topography that provides physical features including slopes and floodplain. Environmental regulations strive to protect these features as distinct benefits for "quality of life." In addition, a significant amount of land west of the city continues to be developed with large-lot single-family housing. This must be designed in a manner to preserve and protect natural features and preserve ag land to the extent possible. This estate residential area is expected to remain substantially less dense than the rest of the city, in part, because of the excessive costs associated with extending utilities to this area in the future. Also, the city is committed to preserving the existing character of the estate area through less intensive land development.

#### **Improvement of Linkages Between Housing and Employment and the Provision of Services to Residents**

West Branch is a community with strong east-west transportation corridors. Interstate 80 is the most significant east-west roadway. Most of the commercial uses in the city have located along Interstate 80. Industrial employment is also in the north and northwest areas of the City. North-south connections across the city are more limited. Most traffic is oriented east-west which tends to cause a portion of residents to funnel out of the city for retail goods and services.

## **Chapter 7 Economic Development**

Economic Development involves every facet of the community, from parks and trails, to technology infrastructure, to strong leadership. West Branch must attend to all these facets in order to support existing businesses, maintain a quality workforce, and foster new economic ventures. Other chapters of this plan outline strategies for preserving natural resources, maintaining a diverse transportation network, providing quality recreational opportunities and public facilities, supporting a reliable infrastructure system, revitalizing existing neighborhoods, and developing land efficiently, profitably, and responsibly. All of these pieces fit together to form a strategy that will support a vibrant, enduring economy. These strategies contribute to the declared economic development goals of West Branch, which are outlined below.

### **CURRENT CONDITION**

Residents of West Branch are fairly satisfied with the current appearance of their community, specifically with the downtown business district. Resident's opinions about the appearance of West Branch were gathered in a survey. Of the 401 surveys submitted, 84% (336) of respondents lived in West Branch while 65 respondents or 16% did not. The survey revealed that 64% of those surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that the City's appearance through tree plantings, flowers and landscaping is adequate. Survey respondents were also satisfied with the City's signage and Main Street facades (68%). The Design Committee as part of West Branch Main Street program strives to improve the physical appearance of the downtown district. The committee works on attractive window displays, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, street lights, and landscaping. This work, along with other community efforts has resulted in a pleasant community appearance. Seventy-four percent of survey respondents reported that the City's efforts to preserve and enhance historic buildings are also thought to be adequate. This can partially be attributed to the National Historic District formed by the downtown buildings. Lastly, just under half (49%) of individuals responding to the survey reported that the City's building and zoning codes adequately maintain the character of the community.

### **WEST BRANCH'S ECONOMIC GOALS**

The economic development goals of West Branch were developed from the various public input methods. These goals are meant to foster economic growth through expansion of existing business and new economic partnerships.

#### **Concentrate on retaining and expanding existing local business.**

In tough economic times, retaining existing business becomes even more critical. Existing business retention and expansion is a crucial component in an overall economic development plan. National economic development studies have shown that 60-80% of future job growth results from the expansion of existing industries.<sup>1</sup> While business retention and expansion may not be as ostentatious as business attraction, it is a critical piece. The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) believes that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/toolbox/best.aspx>

business retention and expansion programs are best performed as a locally driven effort. West Branch has adopted the following goals to ensure the continued success of existing businesses:

#### *Partnerships*

Cooperate with business, educational institutions, community organizations, and government to provide information to local businesses.

#### *Development Sites*

Promote assistance to local firms in finding appropriate development sites for expansion.

#### *Facilitation*

Promote retaining existing manufacturing firms and facilitate their expansion.

#### *Revitalization*

Encourage downtown revitalization and business development.

#### *Diversification*

Encourage diversified retail shopping.

#### **Increase the number of small firms by fostering local entrepreneurship.**

Locally grown, small firms have enormous growth potential. The Small Business Administration reports that small businesses represent 99.7% of all employers and provide approximately 75% of the net new jobs added to the economy.<sup>2</sup> Growing local entrepreneurship will lead to homegrown small businesses in West Branch. Companies started by local entrepreneurs bring new wealth and economic growth to a community. Local entrepreneurs are also likely to remain, grow, and invest in the home community, thus cultivating businesses that are invested in the community. West Branch has adopted the following goals to ensure the continued success of existing business:

#### *Partnerships*

Cooperate with other agencies and institutions to identify programs and services to assist in the creation of new small business.

#### *Financial and Technical Assistance*

Promote support for start-up businesses with both financial and technical assistance.

### **ECONOMIC STRATEGY**

#### *Vibrant and Active Downtown Area*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/toolbox/best.aspx>

A vibrant and active downtown area is important to West Branch residents. Of the 401 survey respondents, 83% or 326 individuals reported that a vibrant downtown was very important or important. People want to be where they can live, work, and play. Fostering a vibrant and active downtown will require the continued success and expansion of local businesses, a multi-modal transportation system, and partnerships with area civic groups. Providing social activities in addition to ensuring the success of retail businesses will be important in coming years.

#### *Incentives for Small Businesses*

The Great Recession has had a significant effect on small businesses, specifically in terms of financing. Banks are making fewer loans to businesses and the loan amounts are also decreasing. According to the Small Business Administration, from 2007 to 2011 the number of loans to commercial and industrial small businesses fell 10% and the total dollars lent to this group declined by 13%.<sup>3</sup> This further demonstrates the need for incentives and loan programs targeted at small businesses. Eighty-three percent of West Branch survey respondents reported that incentives for small businesses to improve their buildings and properties are very important or important. Currently, West Branch Main Street offers a revolving loan fund with 0% interest for loans amounting between \$500 and \$2000. Additional incentive and loan programs are available through the Small Business Association and other state and federal programs. Additional research should be conducted to determine if additional gap financing or incentives are needed to assist businesses in West Branch.

#### *Sustainable or "Green" Community*

Sustainability is defined by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Long lasting sustainability requires a balance between the environment, social equity, and economic development. Sustainability or a "green" community was identified as very important or important to 71% of West Branch survey respondents. There are a number of tools West Branch can utilize to cultivate a culture of sustainability among West Branch residents and the business community. Planning is the first step towards a more sustainable community. ICLEI offers a number of tools for members including a Sustainability Planning Toolkit. East Central Intergovernmental Association also coordinates the Petal Project green business certification program. The program offers businesses a simple framework for saving money and resources while establishing a community-wide definition of a green business. Utilizing these programs and others can guide the West Branch sustainability plan.

#### *Diverse Shopping*

A vibrant and active downtown area requires diverse shopping options. Sixty-one percent of West Branch survey respondents identified diverse shopping opportunities as very important or important. Attracting or growing from within diverse businesses will require the continued development of all of the goals listed above in addition to the availability of infrastructure. Recruiting and retaining these businesses will require constant communication with potential leads and existing business, access to

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/SBE\\_2011\\_2.pdf](http://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/SBE_2011_2.pdf)

incentives and financing, a vibrant downtown and citizens with a “buy local” mindset. Meeting this goal will require collaboration amongst business leaders, government officials, and other civic organizations.

DRAFT

## **Chapter 10: Transportation**

The City of West Branch's transportation system is vital to everyday life within the region. Locally, the transportation system facilitates the movement of people and goods within the region. The system allows residents to get from their homes to employment, education, medical care, and shopping, and it allows people and goods to move in and out of the region. Connections to regional transportation networks allow businesses to import and export goods quickly and efficiently, and allow the region to compete in the global marketplace.

Along with the benefits from transportation, come unintended negative impacts. If left unchecked, pollution, noise, congestion, safety, and high maintenance costs can diminish quality of life for local residents. In addition, some segments of the population such as the disabled, the elderly, and low-income populations are not able to access the transportation system. Through this Comprehensive Plan, the City of West Branch will strive to provide efficient and affordable transportation to residents and businesses while striving to minimize negative impacts. The City of West Branch will work to provide diverse and interconnected modes of transportation, accessibility, safety, and improved environmental quality.

### **Transportation Planning**

The City of West Branch coordinates with a regional transportation planning agency, Regional Planning Affiliation 8 (RPA 10). RPA 10 is a seven-county region that includes Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington counties. RPA 10 facilitates coordination among local, regional, state, and federal agencies on transportation issues and plans. RPA 10 is responsible for planning for the development of a seamless system for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods within and between modes of transportation including streets, highways, bicycle, pedestrian, transit, rail, water, and air.

The City of West Branch Comprehensive Plan provides an overview of the City's transportation system. More detailed transportation information is included in the RPA 10 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The RPA 10 LRTP focuses on transportation related issues over a 20-year period. In accordance with Iowa DOT recommendations, RPA 10 updates its LRTPs every five years. The LRTP provides an explanation of the area's current transportation trends, and a forecast of future transportation issues. Through the LRTP planning process, local residents create the vision and goals that will guide transportation investment within the region over the next 20 years. The RPA 10 LRTP and other transportation planning documents are available for download at [www.ecicog.org](http://www.ecicog.org).

### **Roadways**

The predominant transportation system in West Branch is a network of streets and highways that carry cars and trucks. These roadways serve the circulation needs of local residents and visitors from outside the area. The following section describes the roadway system in the City in terms of functional classification, capacity, congestion, and safety.

## **Functional Classification**

Functional classification describes a roadway based on the type of service that it provides. Roadways provide two basic types of service: land access and mobility. The degree to which a roadway provides access and/or mobility determines its functional classification. The key to planning an efficient roadway system is finding the appropriate balance between mobility and accessibility. The following defines the functional classifications found in West Branch.

**Principal Arterial** roadways primarily serve a mobility function with minimal land access. The primary purpose of principal arterials is the rapid movement of people and goods for extended distances. Principal arterials are high capacity, high-speed roadways with restricted access. US Highway 30 in West Branch is an example of a principal arterial.

**Minor Arterials** interconnect with and augment principal arterials. Minor arterials within urban areas serve inter-community trips of moderate length. Although the primary purpose of the minor arterial is mobility, this functional class provides more access points and more land access than a principal arterial. Bluff Boulevard in West Branch is an example of a minor arterial.

**Collector** streets channel trips between the local street system and the arterials. Collectors serve a balance between mobility and land access. Parking and direct driveway access to the street are typically allowed on collectors. Collectors are usually wider, have higher capacity, and permit somewhat higher speeds than the local street network. Harts Mill Road in West Branch is a collector street.

**Local Streets** primarily provide local land access and offer the lowest level of mobility. Characteristics of local streets include uncontrolled intersections, posted speed limits of 25 miles per hour or less, and few restrictions on parking. Local streets include all streets not classified as principal arterial, minor arterial, or collector.

Map 1 displays West Branch roads by Functional Classification.

## **Traffic Volume**

Traffic volume is an important measure for the transportation system. Understanding traffic volume helps engineers and transportation planners design a road system that is appropriate for the community. Traffic volume is measured in Average Annual Daily Trips (AADT). AADT is the total traffic volume on a road for a year divided by 365 days. Map 2 displays the AADT for West Branch area roads. The data used in Map 2 was collected by the Iowa DOT in 2010. Main Street and Parkside Drive are the most heavily traveled West Branch city streets with 4,070 and 3,900 AADT respectively. Interstate 80 has the highest traffic volume in the area with an AADT of 36,600.

**Roadway Safety** is an important consideration when planning for the future of the transportation system. Outdated or deteriorating infrastructure, high traffic volumes, or unsafe driver behavior are all potential causes of safety issues that can lead to serious injury or death. Transportation planners use crash data to identify areas on the road network where the

number of crashes is higher than expected. Once identified, the local government can take action to correct the problem. Iowa Department of Transportation provides crash data for all counties in the state. Using data from 2008-2010, staff created maps to illustrate the distribution crashes. The maps are used identify locations experiencing more crashes than would normally be expected. See Map 3 for Iowa DOT crash data. During the three year time period 43 crashes occurred within city limits. The crash data shows that while the City is relatively safe, there are some problem areas. Injuries and fatalities from auto crashes can place a burden on local residents and can reduce the overall quality of life in the City. West Branch must continue to work with state and regional transportation staff to improve safety for its roadway users.

### **Transit**

East Central Iowa (ECI) Transit provides demand-responsive rural transit service in the counties of Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington counties. ECICOG is responsible for administration, coordination, and planning of ECI Transit. ECICOG does not directly operate the transit service. ECICOG contracts with a transit service provider in each affiliated county. In Cedar County River Bend Transit provides transit services. In Johnson County transit services are provided by Johnson County SEATS.

### **Bicycle and Pedestrian**

Non-motorized transportation is a key component of a multi-modal transportation system. Good walking and biking facilities can improve quality of life by reducing the number of vehicles on the road, promoting an active lifestyle, attracting visitors to the area, and providing a low cost mode of transportation. In recent years, the City of West Branch has worked to integrate bike and pedestrian facilities into its transportation network. However, according to 2010 Census estimates, only 3.2% of the population walks to work, and only 0.47% rides a bike.<sup>1</sup>

West Branch's bike and pedestrian facilities fall into two categories, separated and on-street facilities. A separated facility is a bikeway/walkway physically separated from motorized traffic by open space or barrier either in the highway right-of-way or in an independent right-of-way. Separated facilities are suitable for all pedestrians and bicyclists. In an on-street route, bicyclists share space with motorized vehicles. On-street routes can take several forms including bike lanes or shared roadways. In some cases, striping, signing, and pavement markings designate a portion of the roadway for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists by. In other cases, an on-street route signage indicates that the route is safe for bicyclists.

When planning a bicycling, hiking, and walking system, local governments should design a system that will accommodate as many users as possible. The system should take into consideration the differing abilities of the potential riders using the system. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) uses the following categories of bicycle users to assist in determining the impact that different facilities and roadway conditions will have on the bicyclist. Group A riders have the most experience, and are comfortable riding on most city streets. Group B bicyclists are less experienced and prefer riding on separated trails or low

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey.  
[http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_10\\_5YR\\_B08301&prodType=table](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_5YR_B08301&prodType=table)

speed low traffic volume streets. Group C bicyclists are children. Children often use bicycles to get to school or recreation, but require well defined separation from motor vehicles.

The Bicycle Federation of America estimates that out of nearly 100 million people in the United States that own bicycles, roughly 5 percent qualify as Group A bicyclists, with the remaining 95 percent as Group B and C bicyclists. See Map 1.6 for the bike and pedestrian facilities in West Branch.

**Safety** – Improving bicycle and pedestrian safety will be a primary concern for West Branch. According to Iowa DOT, the state averages 5 bicyclist and 21 pedestrian fatalities each year. In West Branch, City injury hospitalization data shows bicycle and pedestrian accidents as one of the leading causes of injury and death for residents between the ages of 1 and 34. The Iowa DOT recommends the following to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety:

- Young children need supervision in the traffic environment.
- Children should learn bicycle and pedestrian safety from an early age
- Wearing a helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by as much as 85%.<sup>2</sup>

**Distance** – West Branch’s rural character means that walking or bicycling to a destination can be difficult because of the long distances involved. Local governments can help reduce travel distances by encouraging compact development that reduces sprawl and promotes land use patterns that create more walkable neighborhoods. Examples of this include conservation subdivisions, mixed-use development, and infill development.

**Infrastructure** – Incomplete infrastructure prevents many West Branch residents from walking and biking. Local governments can fill the gaps in the bicycle and pedestrian network working to obtain funding for trails and other facilities, and by exploring new sidewalk or Complete Streets policies. Complete Streets are designed to allow pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit to travel safely alongside automobiles. West Branch communities should continue to work to improve the quality of its residents by supporting programs that make walking and biking safer and more convenient.

### **Freight**

The efficient movement of goods is one of the keys to effective competition in the world market system. As a result, policy makers, industry specialists, and transportation planners have recognized that an efficient freight system is fundamental for economic development in West Branch. This section focuses on the three freight modes which are most active in the West Branch: truck, rail, and air. The freight modes are described separately, but the different modes are often used in combination, which is referred to as intermodal freight transport.

Interstate 80 passes through West Branch. This highway provides a ground connection to the rest of Iowa, the region, and the nation. The rail system that passes through the region is also a valuable resource. Iowa Interstate Railroad operates an east west line that runs approximately 2.5 miles south of West Branch.

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<sup>2</sup> Iowa Department of Public Health. 2002-2006 The University of Iowa Injury Prevention Research Center. <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/iprc/resources/reports/Cedar-County.pdf>

**Airport**

The Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids provides commercial air transportation services for West Branch. Thirty-five daily departures include service from American, United, Delta and Allegiant Air. The Airport also features increasing cargo activity with Fed Ex, DHL, and UPS; and an active general aviation community. The Airport is owned by the City of Cedar Rapids and operated by the Cedar Rapids Airport Commission. plan with Commission match. The Airport is located between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City along Interstate 380. General aviation airports are located in Iowa City, Muscatine, and Tipton.

**Special Transportation Initiatives**

Safe Routes to School? Any other special transportation related projects.

**Future Needs:**

## Chapter 11: Hazards

Hazard Mitigation is critical to the comprehensive planning process, and hazard concerns are integrated throughout this document. In order to facilitate review of the West Branch plan for compliance with Iowa's smart planning grant parameters, this section uses the "safe growth audit questions" from the FEMA publication *Hazard Mitigation: Integrating Best Practices into Planning* as a framework to collect and present the hazard mitigation elements of this plan. The West Branch comprehensive plan focuses primarily on flooding issues for its hazard mitigation recommendations, as this is the hazard most likely to be affected by the decisions of the comprehensive plan (Namely, land use and environmental decisions.)

### SAFE GROWTH AUDIT QUESTIONS FROM "HAZARD MITIGATION: INTEGRATING BEST PRACTICES INTO PLANNING"

#### *Land Use*

- Does the future land-use map clearly identify natural-hazard areas?

Will be completed once future land use map has been completed – future land use map will be discussed at the June 26<sup>th</sup> meeting

- Do the land-use policies discourage development or redevelopment within natural-hazard areas?

Yes, as described above, existing structures in the floodplain areas are noted and mitigation continues to be processed through an ongoing cost-benefit analysis. New development is not planned for flood hazard areas.

- Does the plan provide adequate space for expected future growth in areas located outside of natural-hazard areas?

Will be completed once future land use map has been completed – future land use map will be discussed at the June 26<sup>th</sup> meeting

## *Transportation*

- Does the transportation plan limit access to hazard areas?

Yes. The transportation plan does not encourage access to hazardous area. For example, any new roads and streets proposed for growth areas would not enter the floodplain, but rather would access higher ground.

- Is transportation policy used to guide growth to safe locations?

Yes. Proposed new roads would connect to areas of town that have areas of non-hazard land available for development. Providing access to these areas will encourage development in safe areas. The West Branch floodplain ordinance stipulated that subdivisions should have means of access during flood.

- Are movement systems designed to function under disaster conditions (e.g., evacuation)?

Yes. One of the primary features of the set of proposed transportation changes (Chapter 10) is the provision of multiple access routes to all developed areas, and accommodation of multiple modes of transportation, including auto, bike, and pedestrian. By limiting single access developments (such as dead-end cul-de-sacs), the proposed system allows for greater evacuation possibilities. Most new growth areas have multiple street outlets and all new growth areas have at least one proposed street connection to the existing street network that does not cross a floodplain. A more connected street system also makes safety services such as ambulance/fire service more efficient. Providing multiple mode choices improves safety by allowing options for evacuation and mobility during disaster conditions, particularly for those without vehicles. Proposed street extensions also reduce the load on existing streets, which increases mobility for safety purposes such as ambulance/fire service and other emergency services.

## *Environmental Management*

- Are environmental systems that protect development from hazards identified and mapped?

Yes. **Map X.x** shows floodplains and wetlands. These areas contribute to the natural drainage system that can help prevent flooding in developed areas by moving and dispersing storm water properly.

- Do environmental policies maintain and restore protective ecosystems?

Will be completed once future land use map has been completed – future land use map will be discussed at the June 26<sup>th</sup> meeting

- Do environmental policies provide incentives to development that is located outside of protective ecosystems?

Yes. The future land use map (Map x.x) located new development in areas outside of protective ecosystems and shows areas inside those ecosystems as non-developable (greenways). This map is presented as a guide for the planning and zoning commission and city council in deciding where new development should be allowed. Additionally, the City of West Branch floodplain ordinance places restriction on development in the floodplain.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER ECOSYSTEMS THERE? Preserves, HABITATS, ETC.?

#### *Public Safety*

- Are the goals and politics of the comprehensive plan related to those of the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan?

Yes. The goals and policies of the comprehensive plan are in agreement with the 2011 Cedar County, Iowa Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). The comprehensive plan primarily addresses floodplain issues, as this is the hazard most likely to be affected by the decisions of the comprehensive plan (namely, land use and environmental decisions). The land use plan and storm-water plans in this document correlate directly to several mitigation actions identified in the Cedar County HMP that are fully outlined on the following page. Cedar County in general, has had significant issues with flooding in the past decade and many of the County's mitigation goals are related to flooding, which in turn become crucial to this comprehensive plan in terms of zoning, construction, roads and watershed preservation and restoration. Other factors that correlate from the HMP to the comprehensive plan are in terms of necessary safety systems that relate to mitigation, such as fire and safety personnel, systems and equipment.

- Is safety explicitly included in the plan's growth and development policies?

Yes. Public Safety facility development is covered in chapter 13, while safety concerns regarding natural hazards are referenced as part of the "Comprehensive Planning Principles" and "preservation of Natural Areas" in chapter X.

- Does the monitoring and implementation section of the plan cover safe-growth objectives?

Yes. Chapter 15 outlines a plan and broad timeline for implementation of the safe-growth objectives, including: new residential developments connect well to existing neighborhoods,

and guide growth to non-hazard areas of the city. Chapter 15 also provides possible funding sources to help the City of West Branch accomplish these goals.

***SPECIFIC ACTION STEPS FOR HAZARD MITIGATION FROM THE CEDAR COUNTY MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN INCLUDED IN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN***

- **Storm Water System and Drainage Improvements** – these improvements can serve to more effectively convey runoff within cities and towns, preventing interior localized flooding. May also reduce the risk of illness/disease by eliminating standing water.
- **Stream Bank Stabilization/Grade Control Structures/Channel Improvements** – which can serve to more effectively protect structures, increase conveyance, prevent down cutting, and provide flooding benefits.
- **Drainage Study/Storm Water Master Plan** – Protective steps to identify all potential problems/issues can lead to effectively addressing improvements and prioritizing the projects to improve conditions. These improvements can serve to more effectively convey runoff within jurisdictions, preventing interior localized flooding resulting in damages. This ensures that the most beneficial projects are done first and could possibly eliminate the need for others.
- **Flood-prone Property Acquisition** – Voluntary acquisition and demolition of properties prone to flooding will reduce the general threat of flooding for communities. Additionally, this can provide flood insurance benefits to those communities within the NFIP.
- **Drainage Districts** – Improve land for agricultural and sanitary purposes on a regional basis.
- **Regulation and Enforcements and Updates** – Ensures that no new structures built will be vulnerable to flooding. Reducing damages and health risks associated with flooding.
- **Floodplain Management** – Continue compliance with the NFIP. Good standing enables participants to apply for PDM and HMGP cost-share.
- **Civil Service Improvements** – Having appropriate and up to date equipment along with adequately trained and numbered personnel increases safety and reduces the risk of damage.

## Chapter 12: Parks, Recreational Facilities and Programs

Parks, recreational facilities and programs are vital components to a community's quality of life. Active living or the integration of physical activity into daily life is becoming increasingly popular. Walking, bicycling and hiking are the most popular ways to participate in active living. Providing facilities that support an active living have a variety of social, health, economic, and environmental benefits. These benefits include: improved quality of life, improved livability (which is a positive factor in attracting new residents, businesses and workers), and reduced energy consumption.

### Community Input

The initial public input meeting held received the following public responses:

#### Parks:

- Not a very bicycle/pedestrian friendly community
- Existing parks need to be upgraded
- More amenities at parks
- More green space
- Overall good diversity in parks
- Existing parks are well cared for

#### Recreation:

- More outdoor recreational opportunities needed
- Need a recreational center
- Water activities needed
- Overall excellent variety of recreational opportunities present

#### Trail System:

- More trails needed
- Connectivity between existing trails needed
- Existing system provides nice trails and plenty of places to bicycle and walk

### Facility Analysis

This chapter examines the City of West Branch's existing park and recreational system, including all city-owned and operated recreation areas and other parks with public access. The following components are looked at:

- Current levels of service in the existing park system
- Gaps in service coverage
- An inventory of existing parks

Park facilities are evaluated according to the following standards:

- Park Classification: Facilities are classified according to size of the area they serve.

- Geographic Distribution: The service radius of each park is analyzed to determine if gaps in service area exist.
- Population Service Standards (NRPA): The existing system is analyzed according to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standards for park and recreational facilities.

#### Existing Park System Overview:

The City currently has three existing parks: Beranek Park, New Park (to be named) and Lions Field along with the Hoover Trail. Table 12.1 lists West Branch's park facilities by NRPA category and [map 12.1](#) shows the location of the three existing parks. Here is an overview of the existing park system:

- 10.15 acres of parkland in West Branch (excluding West Branch Community Schools facilities)
- # acres including the West Branch Community School facilities
- Approximately 4.37 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents (excluding West Branch Community Schools facilities)

#### Park Classifications:

A uniform classification system is used to examine the existing parks and future park needs. The plan uses standards for mini parks, neighborhood parks and community parks to assess the adequacy of both existing and future facilities. The following is a summary of each park category.

##### Mini Parks

Description: Fulfill opens space needs or provide niche recreation opportunities.

Location criteria: A service radius size of less than ¼ mile

Size criteria: Less than 1 acre

##### Neighborhood Parks

Description: The basic unit of the park system that serves as the recreational focus of the neighborhood. Focus of neighborhood parks is on informal active and passive recreations.

Location criteria: ¼ to ½ mile distance and uninterrupted by non-residential roads and other physical barriers.

Size criteria: Between 6 to 8 acres for cities 1,000 to 25,000 in population

Standard: 5 acres per 1,000 people

NRPA standard: Is 2.0 acres per 1,000 people. With 8.45 acres of neighborhood parks West Branch meets this standard at 3.64 acres of parkland per 1,000 people.

#### School Parks

Description: Combining parks with school sites can fulfill space requirements for other classes of parks such as neighborhood, community, sport complex and special use.

Location criteria: Determined by the location of the school.

Size criteria: Variable

#### Community Parks/Sports Complex

Description: Serves a broader purpose than neighborhood parks. The focus is on meeting community-based recreational needs as well as preserving unique open space. Consolidates heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities to larger and fewer sites.

Location criteria: Determined by the quantity and usability of the site.

Size criteria: Between 30 to 80 acres

Standard: 5 acres per 1,000 people

NRPA standard: Is 5 to 8 acres per 1,000 people. At this time the City of West Branch does not have any parks in this category.

#### Natural Resource Areas

Description: Land that is set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscape, open space and visual aesthetics.

Location criteria: Depends on the resource availability and opportunity.

Size Criteria: Variable

#### Greenways and Linear Trail Connections

Description: Land used to effectively tie park system components together to form a continuous park environment.

Location Criteria: Depends on resource and availability and opportunity

Size criteria: Variable

#### Private Park and Recreation Facilities

Description: Parks and recreation facilities that are privately owned yet contribute to the public park system. Private facilities can offer either indoor or outdoor recreation opportunities, usually on a membership or fee basis.

Location criteria: Variable, depends on specific use.

Size criteria: Variable

#### Indoor Park/Recreation Facility

Description: Indoor recreational facility that is open to the general public and operated by a public entity.

Location criteria: Located on sites with convenient transportation access.

Size criteria: Variable

Table 12.1 Park System Analysis

Facility	Location	Total Acres	Playground Areas	Playing Fields	Courts	Amenities
Mini Parks						
No Name Park	2 <sup>nd</sup> Street	1.7	Yes	No	No	Shelter, Bathroom and Water Play Feature
Neighborhood Parks						
Beranek Park		5.05	Yes	No	Basketball Court, 2 Sand Volleyball Courts	Bathroom and Shelter
Lions Field	Pedersen Street	3.4	Yes	Soccer Field	No	Bathroom, Water Fountain
Greenways and Linear Trail Connections						
Hoover Trail		1 mile				

### Level of Service

Recreational opportunities are becoming increasingly important factors in keeping existing residents as well as attracting new residents and businesses to the community. The projected 2030 population for the City of West Branch is 2,374. Table 12.2 identifies additional park and recreational space needed to accommodate this increased population. The park and recreational needs for the City of West Branch for 2032 are as follows:

- If the population stays as projected the City should have sufficient neighborhood parks to accommodate the population of 2,374.
- A community park/sports complex should be added to comply with the NRPA standard. This is also supported by the community wide survey where 185 survey participants stated more park space and facilities are needed.

Several factors must be considered when determining a community's future park land needs, including gaps in service coverage and new community demands. Please note that this analysis does not cover physical factors such as geographic location of parks, accessibility, service area and park facilities.

## Geographic Distribution

Park and recreational facilities should be equally distributed throughout the City to provide accessibility by all residents. [Map 12.2](#) shows the location of West Branch's park locations along with the service radius of each park. West Branch currently only has mini and neighborhood parks. A mini park has a service area of ¼ mile while a neighborhood park's service area ranges from ¼ mile to ½ mile.

Table 12.2 Future Park System Needs

Park Type	Existing	Acres per 1,000 Residents	2030 Need* (Existing Level of Service)	Additional Parkland Needed
Neighborhood Parks	8.45	3.64	3.55	0
Community Parks	0	11.6 to 18.6	11.9 to 19.0	11.9
Mini Parks	1.7	0.7	0.7	0
Total Park and Recreation Area	10.15	4.34	16.15	11.9

\*2030 West Branch Population Projection of 2,374

Table 12.3 Park and Recreation Service in Relation to Population

Facility Type	NRPA Standard	Existing Quantity	Present Need	2010 Surplus (Deficit)	2030 Need	2030 Surplus (Deficit)
Baseball Fields	1 per 3,000		0	0		
Softball Fields	1 per 3,000		0	0		
Basketball Courts	1 per 5,000	1	0	1	0	0
Football Fields	1 per 20,000					
Soccer Fields	1 per 10,000	1	0	0	0	0
Golf Course	9 hole 1 per 25,000					
Picnic Shelters	1 per 2,000	3	0	1	0	0
Playgrounds	1 per 2,000	3	0	1	0	0

Running Track	1 per 20,000					
Swimming Pools	1 per 20,000	0	0	0	0	0
Tennis Courts	1 per 2,000					
Sand Volleyball Courts	1 per 5,000	1	0	1	0	0

### Population Service Standards

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) establishes standards for park and recreational facilities based on population. Table 12.3 provides a summary of park facilities based on these standards. Projections of future park facility needs based on 2030 population projection are included in the evaluation. Major findings include:

- West Branch has a higher than average supply of playground equipment and picnic shelters.

More to come with completed table

### Park Site Assessment

#### Beranek Park

Overall condition: good

Proposed Improvements:

#### Lions Field

Overall condition: good

Proposed Improvements:

#### New Park

Overall condition:

Proposed Improvements:

#### Trails:

Existing system: good

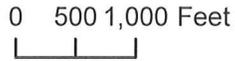
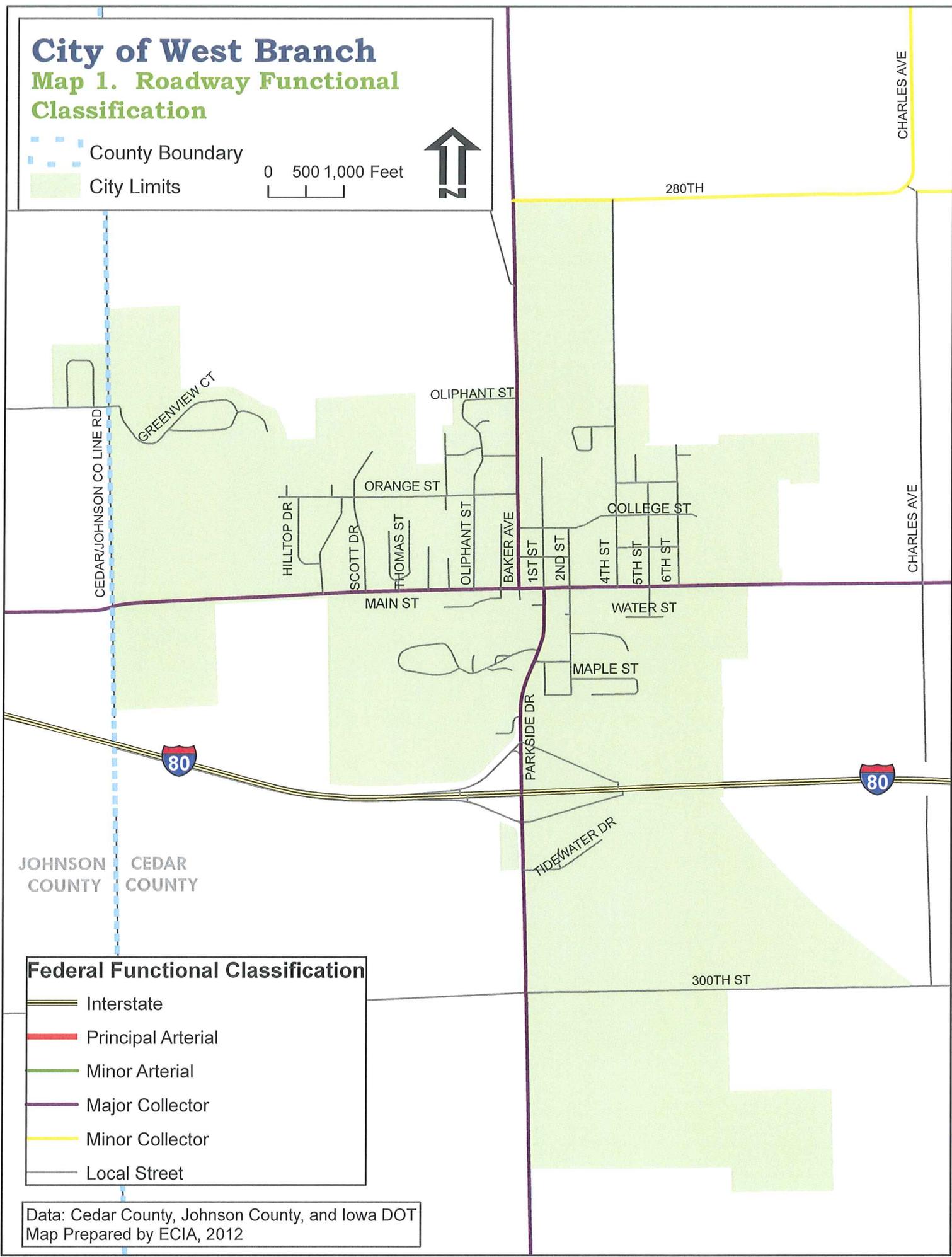
Proposed Improvements: Please refer to the West Branch Community Trails Plan located in appendix #.

# City of West Branch

## Map 1. Roadway Functional Classification

-  County Boundary
-  City Limits

0 500 1,000 Feet

### Federal Functional Classification

-  Interstate
-  Principal Arterial
-  Minor Arterial
-  Major Collector
-  Minor Collector
-  Local Street

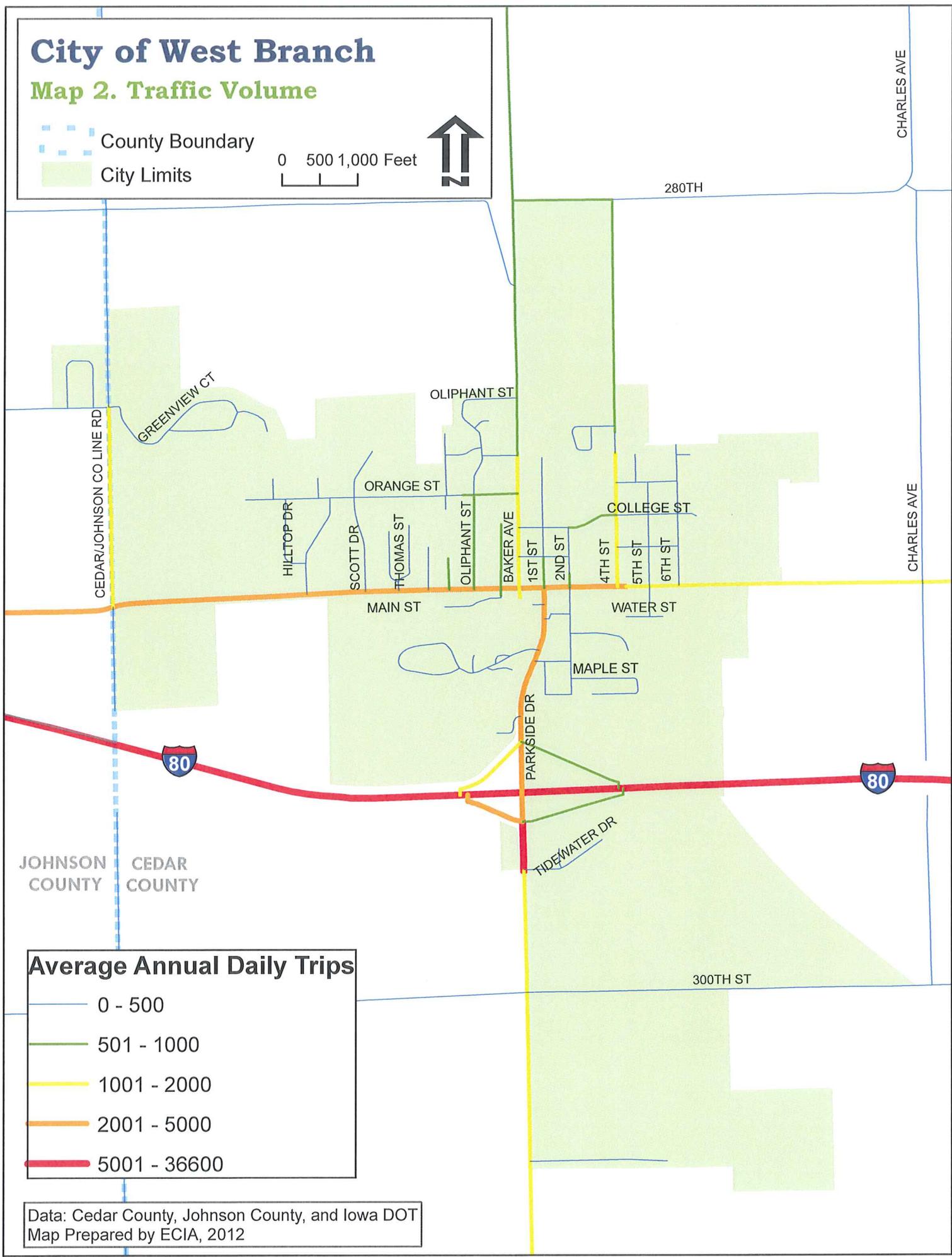
Data: Cedar County, Johnson County, and Iowa DOT  
Map Prepared by ECIA, 2012

# City of West Branch

## Map 2. Traffic Volume

County Boundary  
City Limits

0 500 1,000 Feet



### Average Annual Daily Trips

- 0 - 500
- 501 - 1000
- 1001 - 2000
- 2001 - 5000
- 5001 - 36600

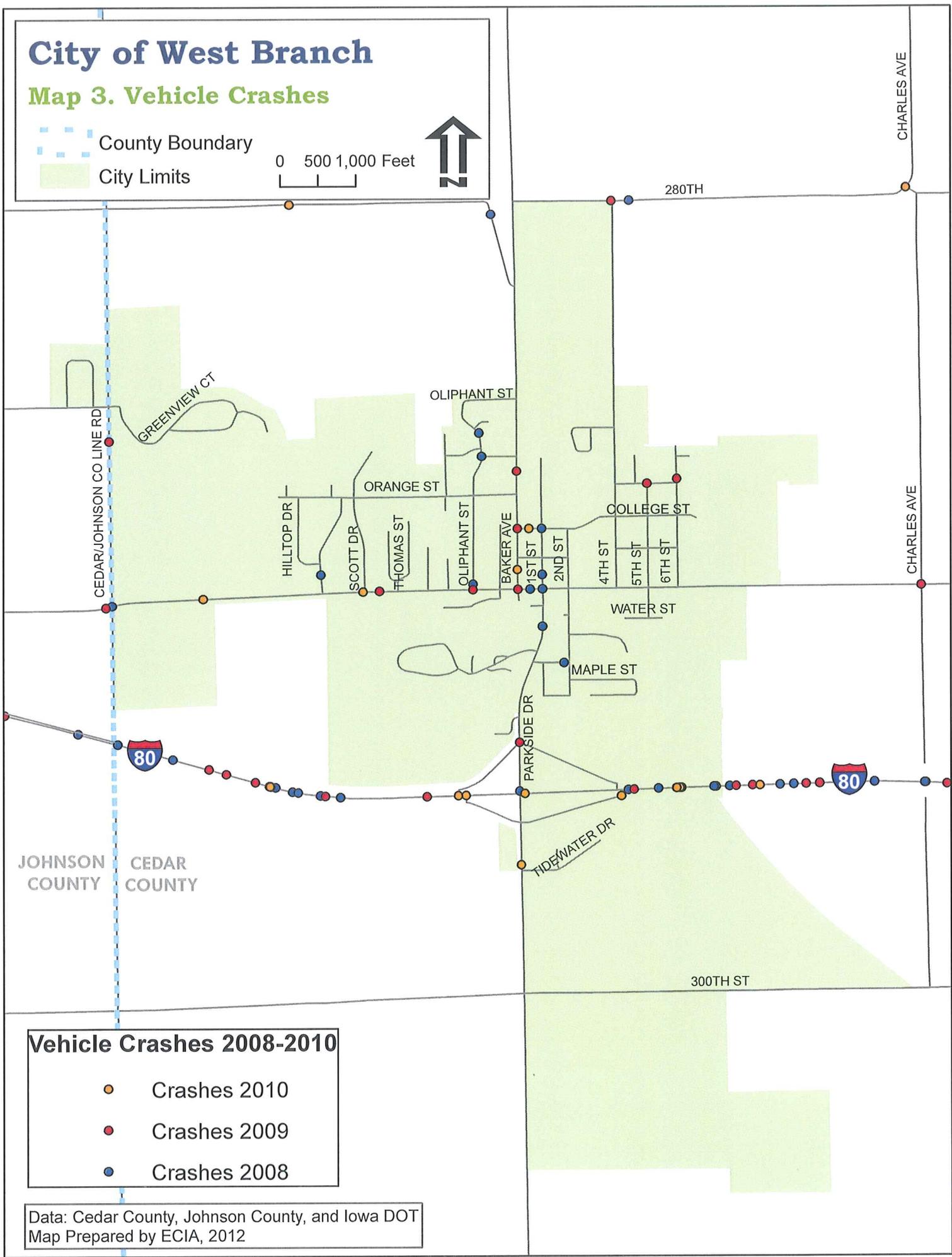
Data: Cedar County, Johnson County, and Iowa DOT  
Map Prepared by ECIA, 2012

# City of West Branch

## Map 3. Vehicle Crashes

- County Boundary
- City Limits

0 500 1,000 Feet



### Vehicle Crashes 2008-2010

- Crashes 2010
- Crashes 2009
- Crashes 2008

Data: Cedar County, Johnson County, and Iowa DOT  
Map Prepared by ECIA, 2012

West Branch Comprehensive Plan Public Input Survey Results – 401 surveys submitted

I am a West Branch resident: 336

I am not a West Branch resident: 65

1). What are your opinions about the current appearance of the West Branch community?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. The City’s appearance through tree plantings, flowers and landscaping is adequate.	35	218	30	102	12
b. The City’s signage and Main Street façades are adequate.	40	231	39	74	10
c. The City’s efforts to preserve and enhance historic preservation are adequate.	64	229	38	54	10
d. The City’s building and zoning codes to maintain the character of the community are adequate.	33	163	109	61	27

Comments: enforce codes, area around Interstate 80 needs improvement, revitalize and rehabilitate buildings and houses

2. How do each of the following affect your quality of life in West Branch?

	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	No Opinion
Many Diverse Shopping Opportunities	68	169	135	15
Vibrant and Active Downtown Area	112	214	57	8
Incentives for Small Businesses to Improve their Buildings/Properties	123	200	49	18
Sustainable or “Green” Community	91	183	93	20
Sidewalks	193	161	38	2
Bicycle Paths/Bikeways	196	143	42	10
Road Repair and Maintenance	240	143	8	2
Sewer and Water	225	147	9	10

Comments: incentives for businesses, water quality, sidewalks, need more businesses

3. How would you prefer the City of West Branch spend public funds for transportation improvements over the next 10 – 20 years?

	High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority	No Opinion
Sidewalks	208	124	55	5
Trails	76	135	164	13
Streets	232	130	20	7
Other: college street, intersection of Johnson and Cedar, school bus, shuttle service to Iowa City	9	14	0	1

4. What types of services or retail establishments would you like to be located closer to your home or elsewhere in the City of West Branch?

	Closer to Home	In the City		Closer to Home	In the City
Pharmacy	68	202	Clothing Store	67	81
Assisted Living Center	63	170	Florist	48	143
Convenience Store/Gas Station	65	137	Recreation/Community Center	71	189
Book Store	63	94	Bakery	58	143
Hotel	59	122	Deli	53	118
Hardware Store	68	194	Laundromat	57	153
Grocery Store	59	169	Dry Cleaner	55	93
Health Club/Fitness Center	68	134	Restaurant, if yes what kind: family restaurant	38	151
Entertainment	63	135	Bank	45	116
Specialty Stores	55	100	Big Box Store	65	68
Other: banquet hall, in city food delivery, feed store, movie theater, dollar store	61	115	Other: _____		

5. Do you agree that the following services adequately meet the needs of the residents?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Police Protection	165	183	18	19	4
Fire Protection	235	128	11	9	1
Services provided at City Office (water bills, pet licensing, building permits, etc.)	115	202	48	9	6
Snow Removal	146	189	19	10	6
Street Sweeping	85	201	52	32	7
Street Repair and Maintenance	39	181	39	87	25
Activities for Senior Citizens	8	50	190	98	29
Activities for Adults	10	69	127	126	37
Activities for Teenagers	9	49	113	125	77
Activities for Youth	25	92	91	98	64
Library Services	121	193	41	25	3
Parks (Lion's Field, Baranek Park)	58	182	68	54	9
Park and Recreation Programs	38	151	90	68	25
Trails	39	131	90	76	23

6. Please list new services, or improvements to existing services, that you think should be provided for residents?  
Sidewalks, shuttle service to Iowa City, trails, community-recreation-senior center

7. What kinds of municipal, social, or educational facilities are not currently located in Town, but should be?  
More activities for youth and teens, pool, movie theater, community-recreation-senior center, splash pool and adult education programs

8. Based on your observations of the City of West Branch as it is now, what is your opinion of the amount of land devoted to each of the following types of uses?

	Too Much	About Right	Need More	No Opinion	I Don't Know
Single Family Residential Homes	5	234	69	34	19
Condominium Residences	60	175	53	56	18
Commercial Uses (shopping, services, food/beverage establishments, offices)	3	122	200	31	9
Mixed Use Development (commercial and residential uses)	11	134	93	92	22
Hotel and Motel Units	7	125	135	88	12
Natural Areas, Open Space and Wildlife Habitat	23	180	109	45	9
Apartment Buildings	34	155	92	105	20
Civic Spaces (parks, pedestrian plazas, outdoor entertainment)	16	141	174	34	7
Elderly/Assisted Living Facilities	9	114	143	57	24

9. Should the City enhance its code and other ordinances? Yes (97) or No (160)

If yes what area(s): Sidewalks, enforce existing codes, review and update existing codes, less restrictive codes, property maintenance

10. What are your opinions about the park and recreational services in the City?

	Agree	Disagree	I Don't Know
There are enough recreational facilities for families	108	209	45
There are enough programs and services for teens and children	74	214	77
There are enough programs and services for senior citizens	48	167	148
There are enough organized activities for singles and adults	59	196	105
The facilities are adequately maintained	189	86	80
More park space and facilities are needed	185	130	46
The existing trail system is adequate	186	130	50
The existing trail system is adequately maintained	211	75	78
More trails are needed	151	147	64

11. Is there a specific area in the City where safety should be improved for pedestrians? Yes (210) or No (92)

If yes, where: College Street Bridge, College Street, Poplar & Oliphant, add sidewalks where they are missing, Downtown, Cedar Street, Johnson Street, steps

12. What are the most important housing problems in the City? (Please indicate a maximum of three reasons, ranking them from 1 to 3, with 1 being the most important)

	1	2	3
Not enough rental	45	51	48
Property maintenance	94	65	32
High purchase prices	56	68	39
Not enough housing for single people	35	45	46
Not enough housing for young couples/families	43	63	45
Not enough senior housing	76	39	57
Not enough choice in moderate price ranges	51	97	53
Not enough affordable housing	55	58	51
Other:	7	7	13

13. Why do you choose to live in the City of West Branch? (Please indicate a maximum of three reasons, ranking them from 1 to 3, with 1 being the most important)

	1	2	3		1	2	3
Lived here all my life	57	16	49	Small town atmosphere	99	74	61
Family and friends nearby	77	36	37	Scenic beauty	19	39	36
Convenience of services	10	31	43	Proximity to Iowa City	92	81	43
Close to work	64	38	56	Housing availability or cost	29	49	47
Quality of schools	69	59	33	Hoover Library and National Park	13	21	63
Other:	31	30	39				

14. Would you support extending the 1% local option sales tax to pay (or help pay) for the following projects?

	Strongly Support	Support	No Opinion	Oppose	Strongly Oppose
Replacement of College Street Bridge	94	122	49	49	45
Paving Project on 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	49	83	116	65	45
Paving Project on County Line Road	33	79	118	70	49
Purchase of a New Street sweeper or Snowplow	32	78	108	89	53
Other Street Repair and Maintenance	57	156	70	42	31
Main Street Landscaping	40	103	67	87	52
Library Expansion	70	117	51	68	51
New Community Center	102	97	39	44	53
Trail Improvements	59	80	75	78	62
Capital improvements in our Parks	40	106	93	64	52

15. Would you support the city borrowing funds to pay for the following projects?

	Strongly Support	Support	No Opinion	Oppose	Strongly Oppose
Replacement of College Street Bridge	67	126	51	67	49
Paving Project on 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	29	80	119	91	43
Paving Project on County Line Road	22	77	110	92	47
Purchase of a New Street sweeper or Snowplow	19	79	89	108	54
Other Street Repair and Maintenance	40	134	76	69	30
Main Street Landscaping	30	60	71	107	92
Library Expansion	57	97	62	80	54
New Community Center	110	88	42	59	53
Trail Improvements	36	102	67	115	70
Capital Improvements in our Parks	21	67	75	103	59

16. Do you think the city should establish a road between Pederson Valley and Greenview (from Greenview Drive in Pedersen Valley to Greenview Circle)? Yes (207) or No (112)

Why: Developers responsibility, safety traffic concerns, or need walk/bike path