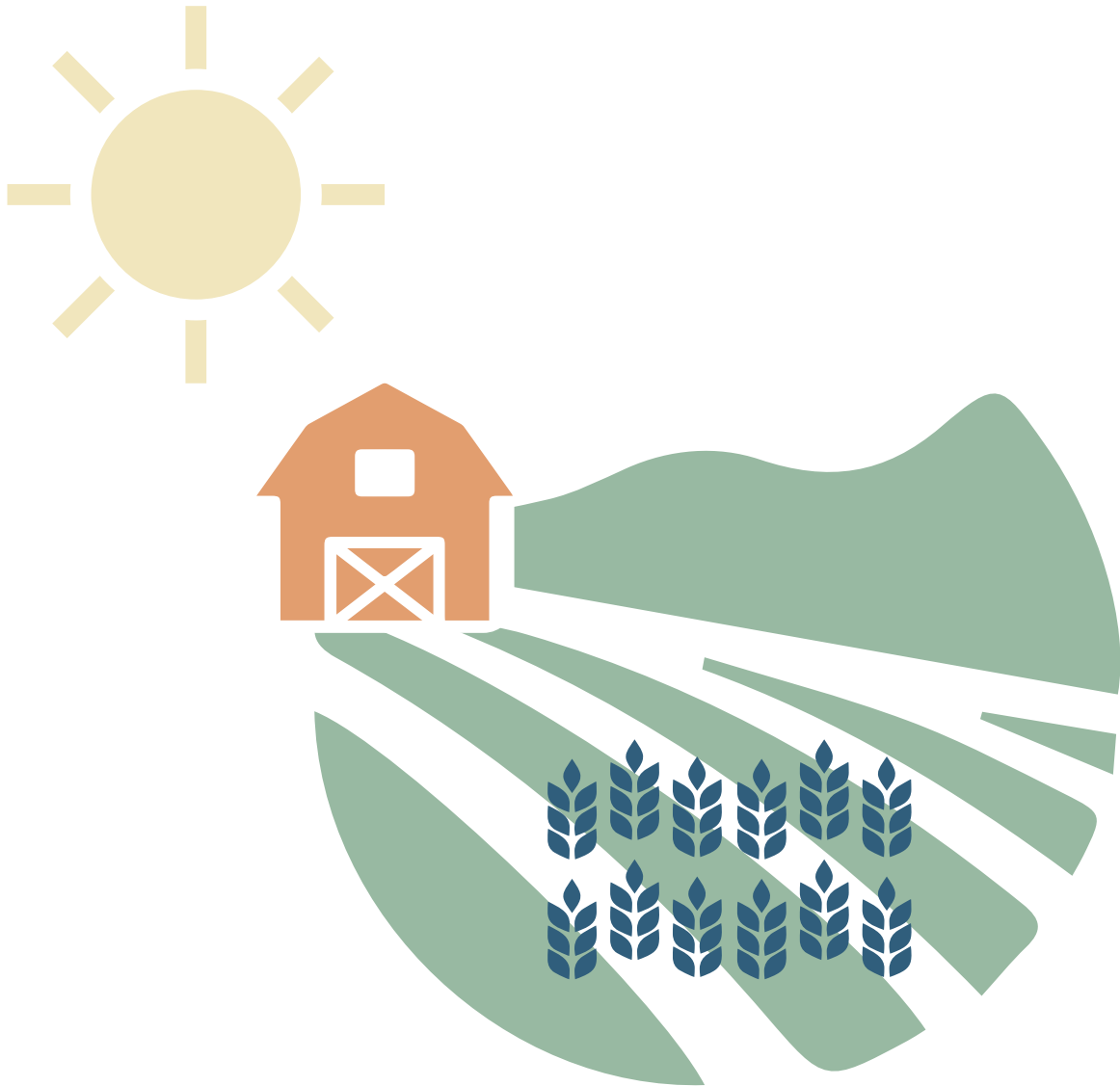




Future Land Use Chapter

for the
Mills County Comprehensive Plan Update

Final and Adopted May 28, 2024



Introduction

Chapter Overview

The Future Land Use Chapter for Mills County, Iowa provides a guide to growth and development of land uses through the year 2050 and beyond. This Plan outlines existing land use, public input related to future land uses, and recommendations for land use and growth management including an updated Future Land Use Plan.

Future Land Use Plan

This Plan sets out the preferred land use composition and distribution throughout the unincorporated areas of Mills County. As this is a county plan, there is a particular emphasis on land preservation and land uses designed to avoid conflicting development patterns and promote harmony within each area of the county.

Legal Basis for Comprehensive Plans

The Future Land Use Plan serves as the legal basis for determining appropriate zoning in unincorporated portions of the county. Zoning regulations, according to Chapter 335 of the Iowa Code, must “... be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan.”

Iowa Code Chapter 335.5 further requires county-level comprehensive plans to be designed to preserve agricultural land, protect soil from erosion, encourage efficient urban development patterns, and protect health and the general welfare. Regulations within the comprehensive plan should consider the character of the area and the suitability of each area for particular usage.

The Comprehensive Plan should be consulted whenever the county amends a zoning code regulation or when a property is rezoned to ensure the change is consistent with the recommendations and land use designations of this plan. The County will review the Plan annually and ask for public comment every five years or as needed.



Introduction

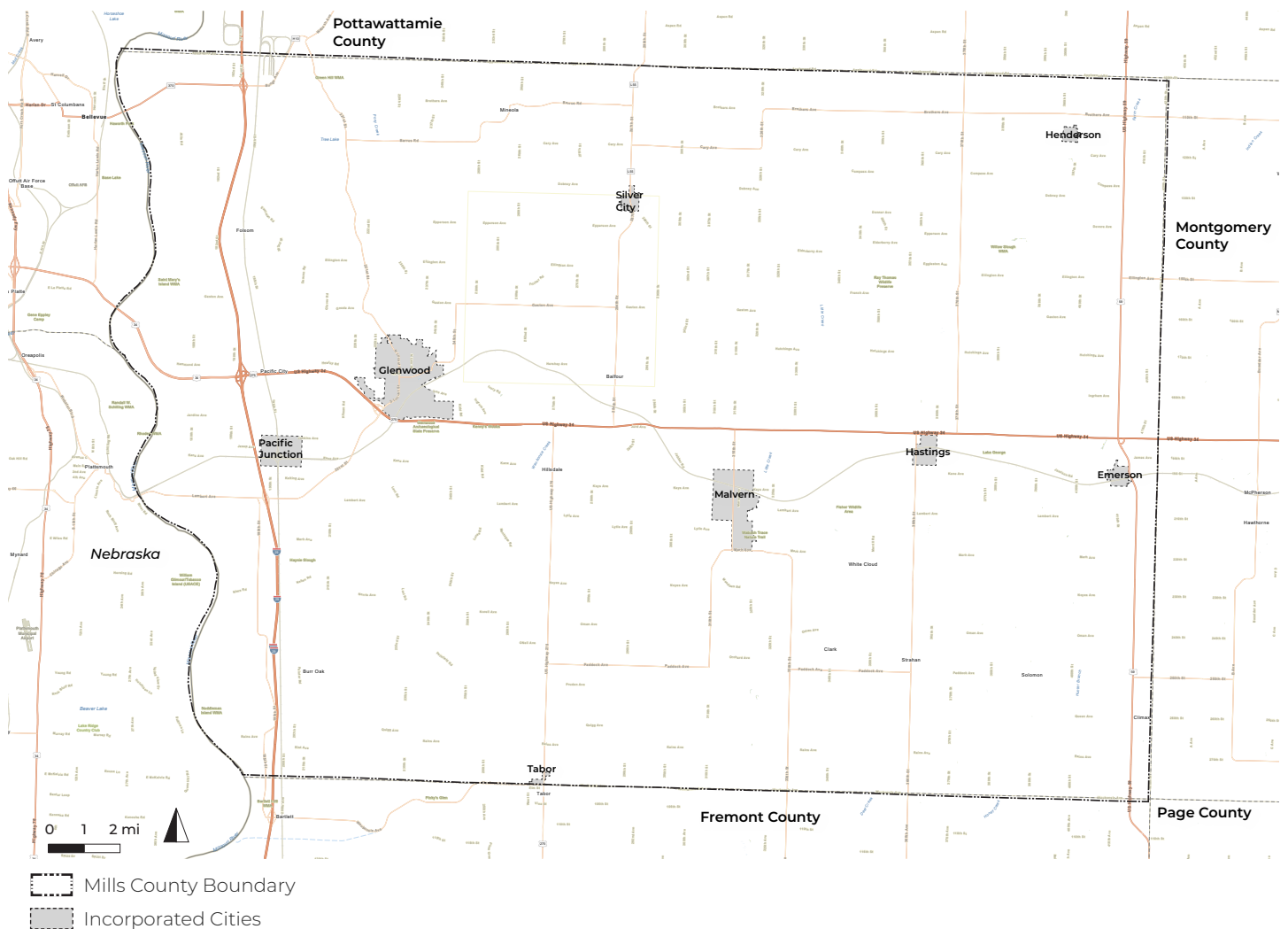
Planning Boundary

Overview

Figure 1.1 shows the planning boundary for the Mills County Future Land Use Plan. Mills County is responsible for the unincorporated areas within the county limits. Incorporated areas are shown in grey in the map below, and include Pacific Junction, Glenwood, Hastings, Henderson, Tabor, Silver City, Emerson, and Malvern.

Mills County is bordered by neighboring counties of Pottawattamie, Cass, Montgomery, Page, and Fremont.

Figure 1.1 // Planning Boundary





Introduction

Existing Land Use

To better plan for the future of Mills County, an analysis of existing land uses was completed to understand current development patterns and uses. The major land uses within the county are described below.

Agriculture

Agriculture is by far the dominant land use in unincorporated Mills County, encompassing over 95% of the land.

Low-Density Residential

Low-Density Residential includes all residential land such as agricultural dwellings, rural residential estates, and single-family detached homes. Around 4% of land in unincorporated Mills County is low-density residential.

Commercial

Most commercial land in unincorporated Mills County surrounds the cities of Pacific Junction, Glenwood, Malvern, and Hastings. There are approximately 1,300 acres of commercial land in Mills County, which account for just under 0.5% of total land.

Parks and Trails

Parks and Trails include county and state parks along with recreational land or conservation areas. There are around 400 acres of parks and trails in unincorporated regions of the county.

Industrial

Industrial land use is for higher-intensity uses such as distribution centers, manufacturing, or warehousing. Approximately 345 acres of land in unincorporated Mills County is industrial.

Public

This category includes any county, state, or federally-owned land within the unincorporated areas of the county. Around 160 acres of Mills County is set aside for these uses.

Supplementary Residential

With only 55 acres of land, the smallest land use designation in Mills County includes duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, and manufactured homes.

Table 1.1 // Existing Land Use Breakdown

Existing Land Use	Acres	Share (%)
Agriculture	257,350	95.2%
Rural Residential	10,620	3.9%
Commercial	1,300	0.5%
Parks and Trails	387	0.1%
Industrial	347	0.1%
Public	160	0.1%
Supplementary Residential	56	0.1%
Total	270,220	100%

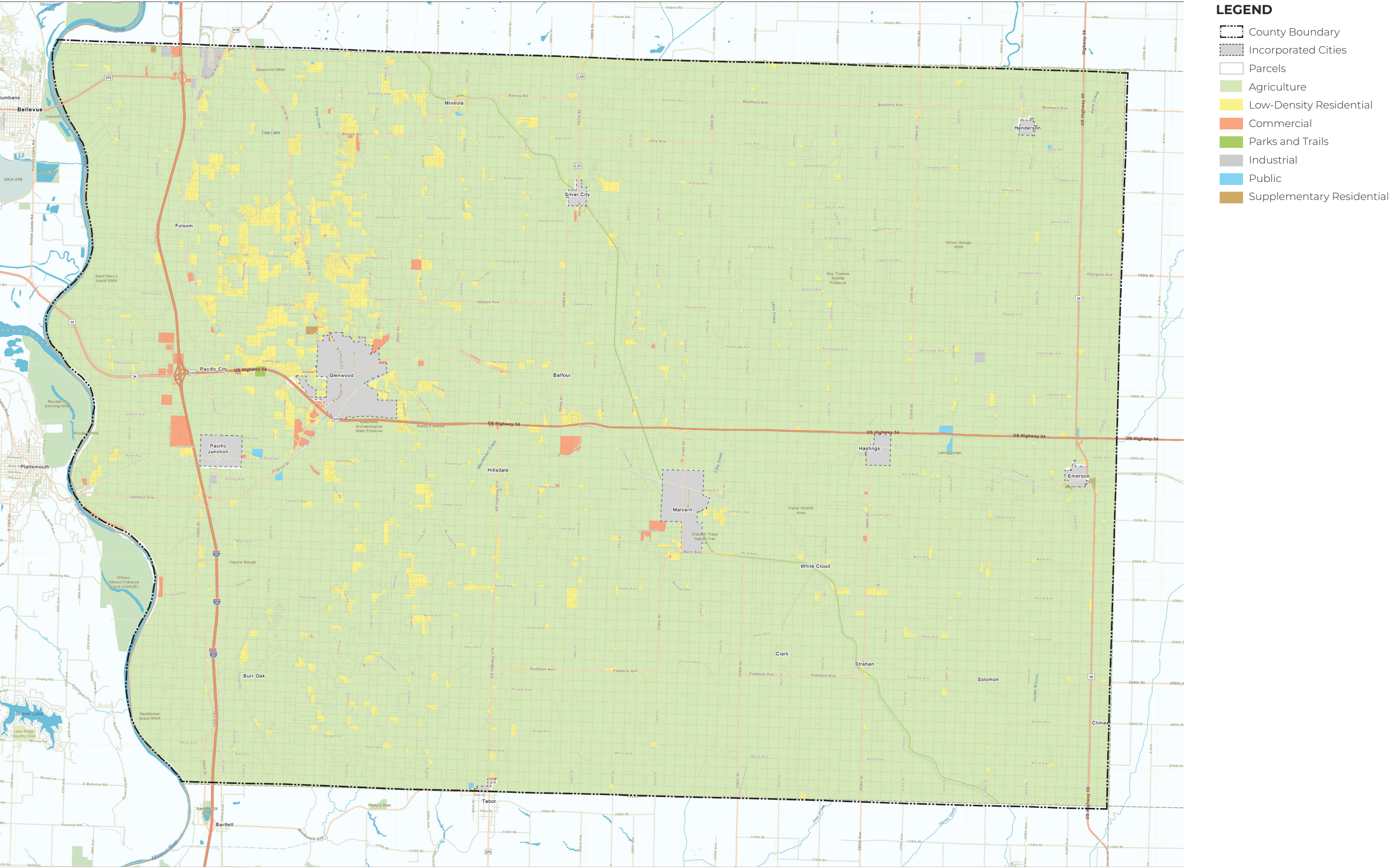
Table 1.2 // Developed Land Use Breakdown

Existing Land Use	Acres	Share (%)
Rural Residential	10,621.2	85.1%
Commercial	1,299.1	10.4%
Industrial	344.6	2.8%
Public	160.9	1.3%
Supplementary Residential	56.2	<0.01%

Developed Land

Developed land in Mills County makes up only 5% of total unincorporated land. Of the 12,482 acres of developed land in the county, the large majority (85%) is Rural Residential. A tenth of developed land is Commercial, with Industrial, Public, and Supplementary Residential land uses comprising less than 5% of all developed land.

Figure 1.2 // Existing Land Uses in Mills County, Iowa





Introduction

Population Growth & Demand

Current Population

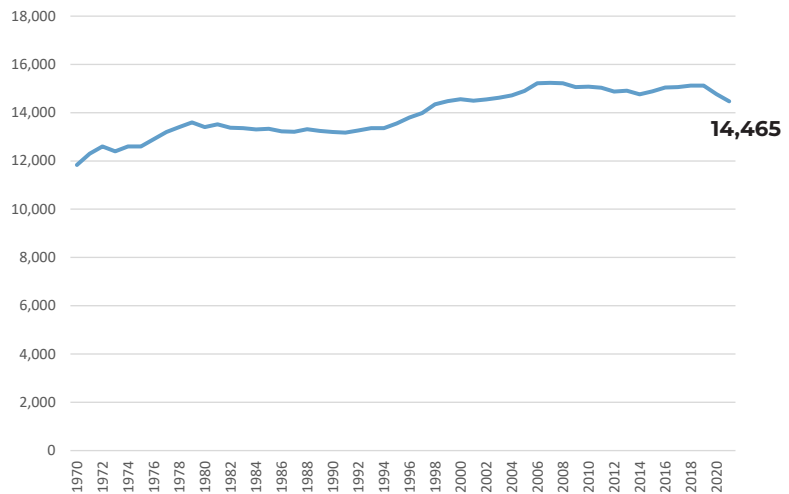
Mills County has continued to see population growth in the past several decades, gaining around 2,500 residents between 1970 and 2021. This modest growth has countered the trends of most rural counties in Iowa, which have experienced prolonged population loss. Mills County growth is likely due to its proximity to the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area.

Sarpy County in neighboring Nebraska has seen tremendous growth rates as a result of Omaha's population growth. While Mills County should not expect this same level of growth, it will likely continue to face some growth pressures. Certain geographic features, such as the large amount of floodplain, the Loess Hills, and prime agricultural land will prevent large-scale population growth or development in Mills County.

Population Growth

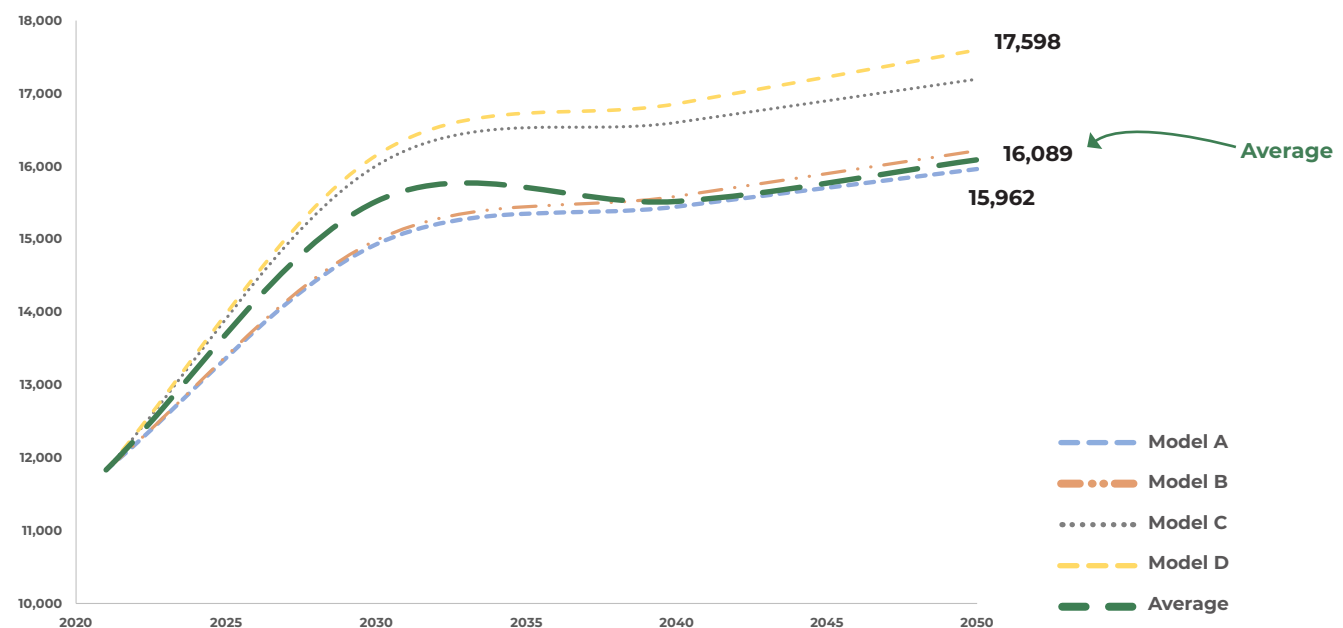
The Future Land Use Plan is guided by expected population growth in Mills County. Figure 1.4 shows the population projections of several scenarios based on past growth and predicted future trends.

Figure 1.3 // Population of Mills County, 1970-2021



Source: U.S. Census ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates

Figure 1.4 // Population Projections 2021-2050



Source: Confluence

Public Input

Future Land Use

Public input was a critical component of developing this Comprehensive Plan. The public input strategy included four public workshops held throughout the County and an interactive engagement website.

Public Workshop Series

Figures 1.5-1.10 highlight the public workshop series' participation. The public workshop included discussion of comprehensive planning 101, demographics, utility scale solar farm components, and a number of visioning questions.

Results from the visioning questions related to future land use highlight a few key themes:

-  Residents would like to retain as much agricultural land as possible to maintain the character of the county.
-  Proximity to the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metro and major roadway connections enables Mills County to establish supportive industry and expand the local economy.
-  Interstate 29 is an opportune location for local industry and job growth.
-  The zoning code should be finely balanced to protect both participating and non-participating landowners.

Figures 1.5-1.10// Public Workshops March 6, 13, 15, 16 of 2023





Public Input

Future Land Use

Interactive Website Engagement

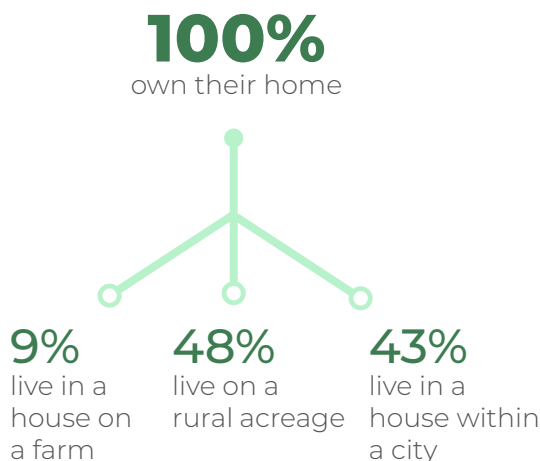
To capture input from as wide an audience as possible, an interactive website was available for residents to share their thoughts about the county's future. The website included a short survey, an interactive mapping activity shown in Figure 1.11, a budget exercise related to priorities for Mills County, and image voting for residential development, parks and open spaces, and commercial and industrial development.

The results of online engagement are found below.

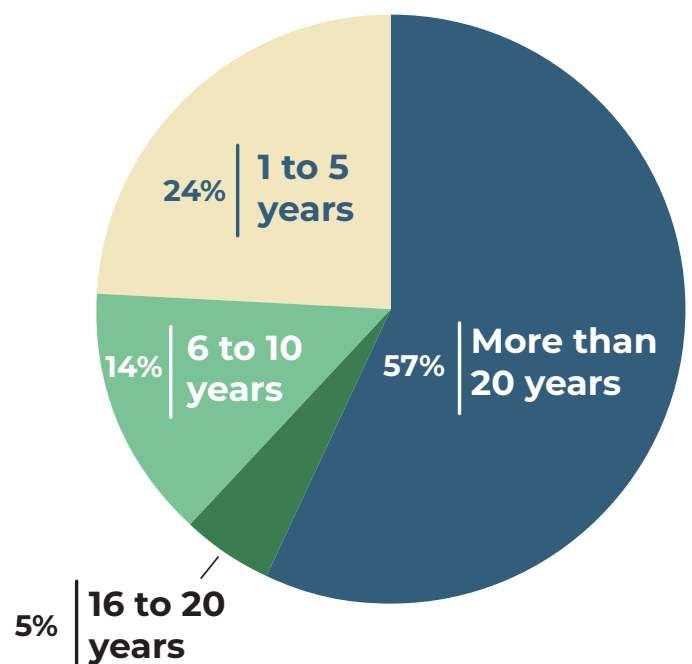
Where respondents live:



Housing types of respondents:



How long respondents have lived or owned in Mills County:



Public Input

Future Land Use

When asked to choose the five most important issues in Mills County, the most common responses were:

- Farmland preservation
- Housing availability and affordability
- Conservation of sensitive natural features and open space
- Economic growth
- Community involvement / awareness and education
- Infrastructure improvements
- Parks and recreation



85%
of respondents believe preserving agricultural land should be a priority in Mills County



95%
of respondents believe local food production is important to the future of Mills County



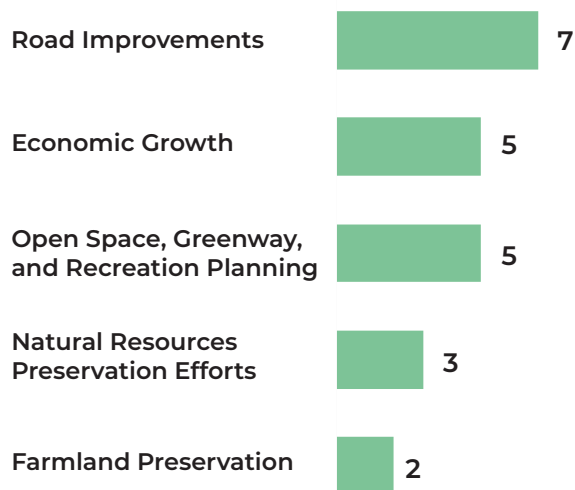
100%
of respondents believe maintaining Mills County's rural and small-town feel is important as the county continues to grow



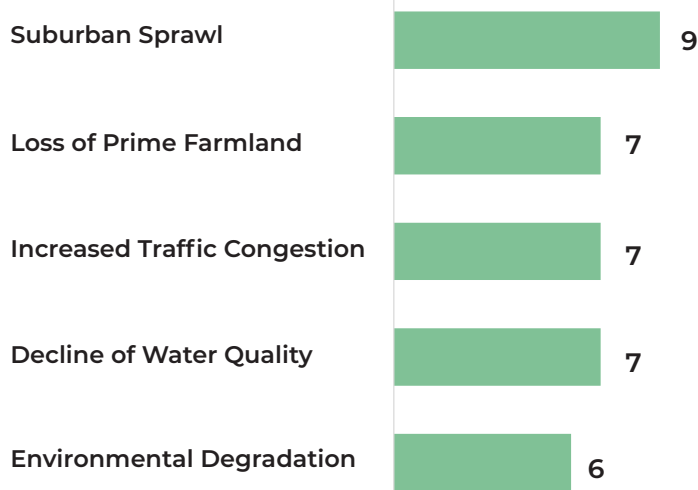
67%
of respondents believe renewable energy production is important to the future of Mills County

Participants were asked to select the two best and two worst trends Mills County has experienced recently:

BEST TRENDS:



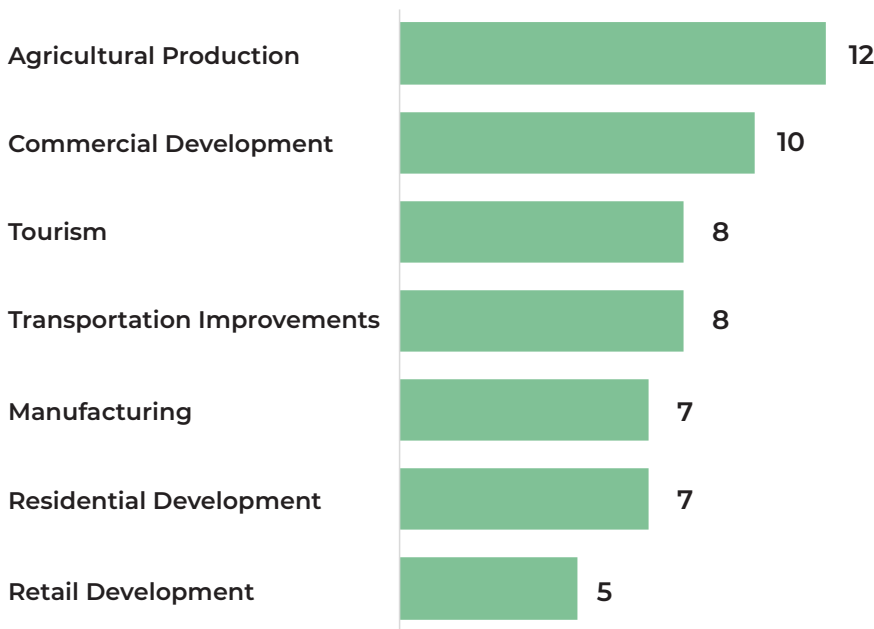
WORST TRENDS:



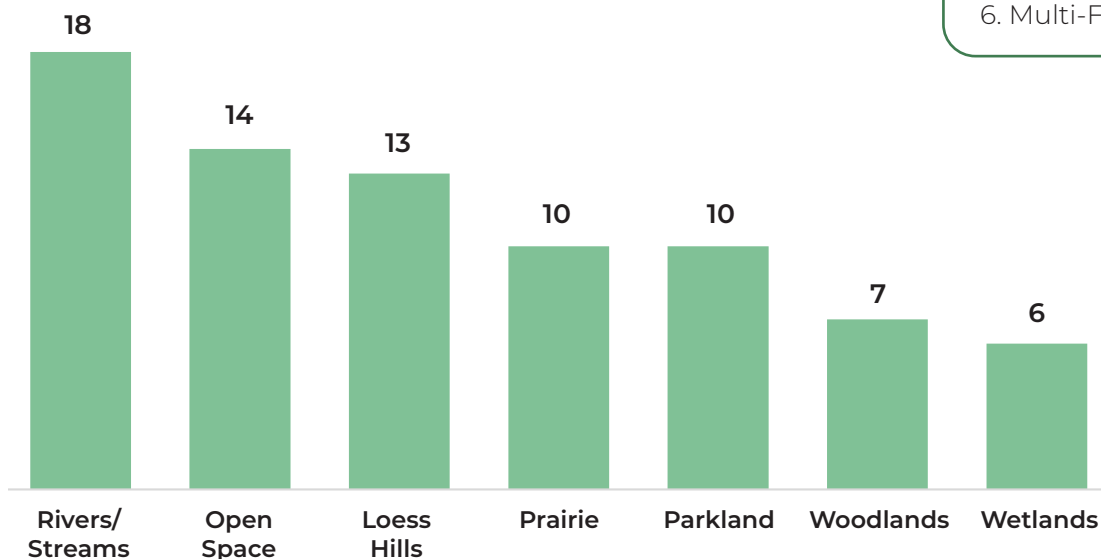


Public Input Future Land Use

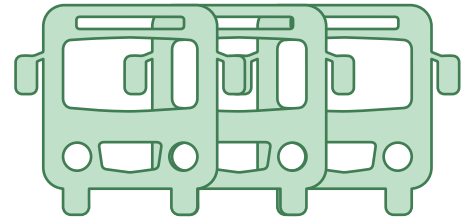
Participants believe that growth in unincorporated Mills County should focus on:



The natural resources which respondents selected as needing the most attention in order to improve or maintain life in Mills County:



Transportation in Mills County:



62%

of respondents believe the availability of bus or van service is important to the future of Mills County

When asked to rank housing types by importance for Mills County (1=highest, 6=lowest), respondents selected:

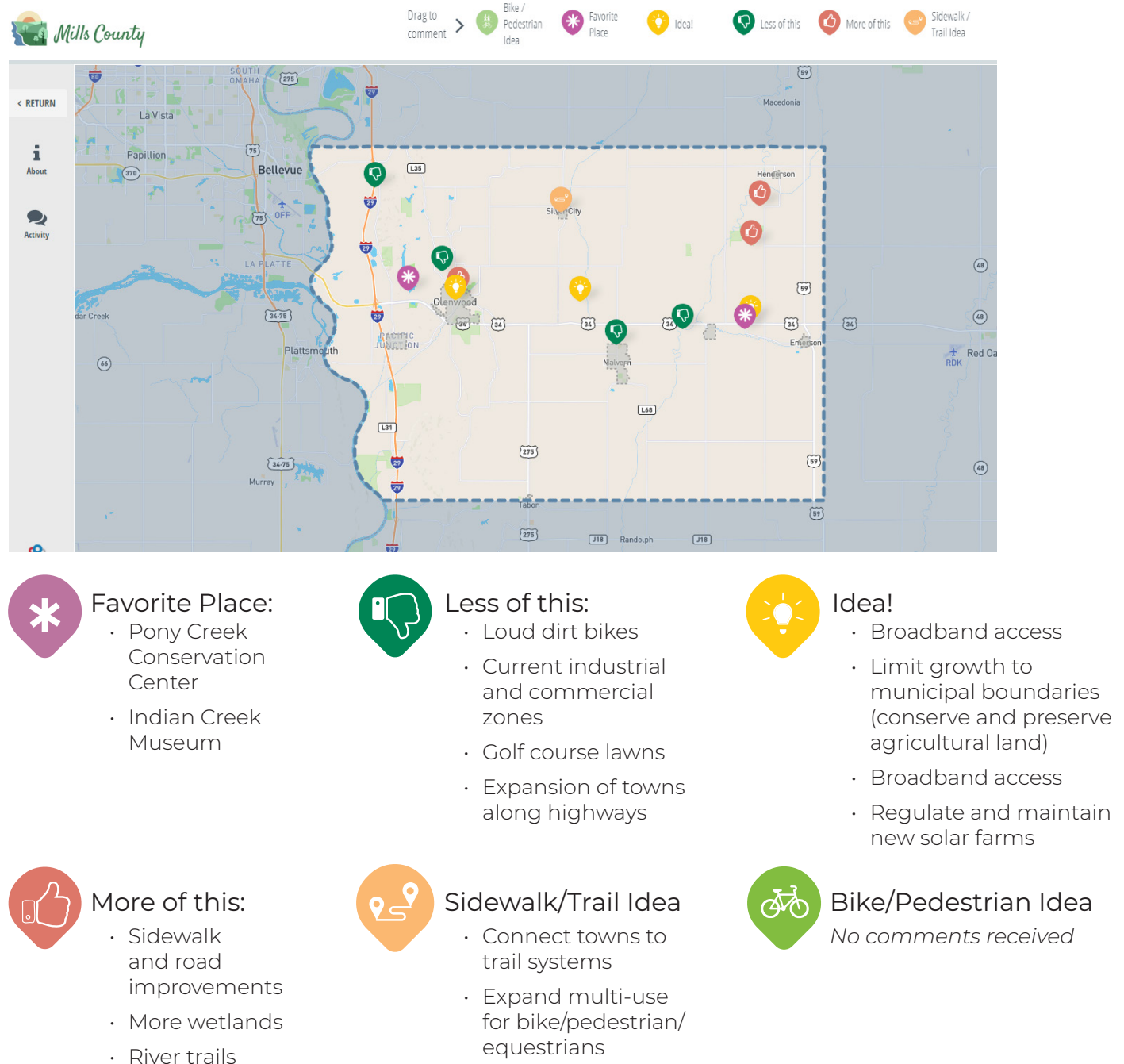
1. Single Family
2. Affordable Housing
3. Senior Housing
4. Duplexes
5. Townhomes & Rowhouses
6. Multi-Family (Apartments)

Public Input

Future Land Use

The website included an interactive map of Mills County on which participants could comment using different icons: Favorite Place, Idea, More of this, Less of this, Sidewalk/Trail Idea, and Bike/Pedestrian Idea. Figure 1.11 displays the map with summaries of the comments below.

Figure 1.11 // Interactive Map Activity





Public Input

Future Land Use

Image Voting

The public workshops and interactive website included image voting surveys for various topics related to growth in Mills County. The four categories were low-density residential, multi-family residential, parks and open space, and commercial and industrial development. In general, participants preferred the following elements of development: traditional style small and medium lot homes, multi-use and bike paths, open space, modern industrial complexes, and traditional commercial storefronts with nice facades.

The most preferred images for each category are found below.

LOW-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



Preferred Housing Types:

- Small Lot Homes
- Medium Lot Homes
- Traditional Style
- Tree Coverage

MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL



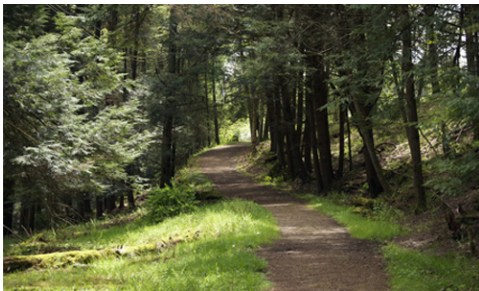
Preferred Housing Types:

- Medium Density Homes
- Traditional Style
- Tree Coverage

Public Input

Future Land Use

PARKS & OPEN SPACE



Preferred Amenities:

- Multi-Use Path
- Bike Path
- Open Space

COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL



Preferred Styles:

- Modern Industrial Complexes
- Traditional Commercial Storefronts with Nice Façades



Future Land Use

Key Considerations

Key Land Use Considerations

In Mills County, there are several factors that influence existing or proposed future land uses.



Agricultural Land Preservation

Mills County has over 260,000 acres of agricultural land, comprising 96% of unincorporated land in the county. It is clear from public opinion that preserving this space is paramount, and this must be balanced with the need to grow the economy and provide adequate housing for residents.



Balanced Growth

In order to preserve the balance of small town character and rural feel with residential growth, the housing needs for current and future residents must be weighed with the preservation of agricultural land. Balanced growth also involves providing adequate infrastructure for new residential expansion.



Loess Hills

The Loess Hills is a unique landform found in only one other place on earth, and the conservation of this land is critical. The locations of future residential development in this plan was determined with the intention of preserving as much of this natural feature as possible. The Loess Hills currently face threats of erosion, mining, and urban sprawl.



Floodplain

Commercial and residential land uses should be limited in areas within the floodplain, primarily along the Missouri River, Silver Creek, and the East Nishnabotna River. This is particularly relevant within the northeastern quadrant of the county, and between Malvern and Hastings.



Renewable Energy

Mills County's proximity to Omaha-Council Bluffs paired with its expansive amount of agricultural land makes it a compelling location for utility-scale renewable energy. The location of solar farms should not be in sensitive areas such as Loess Hills Scenic Byway.



Economic Development

Development of highway commercial businesses in particular would be an economic benefit to Mills County. These locations have been identified in the Future Land Use Map. In addition, there is potential for new business park development surrounding several highway commercial nodes within the county.

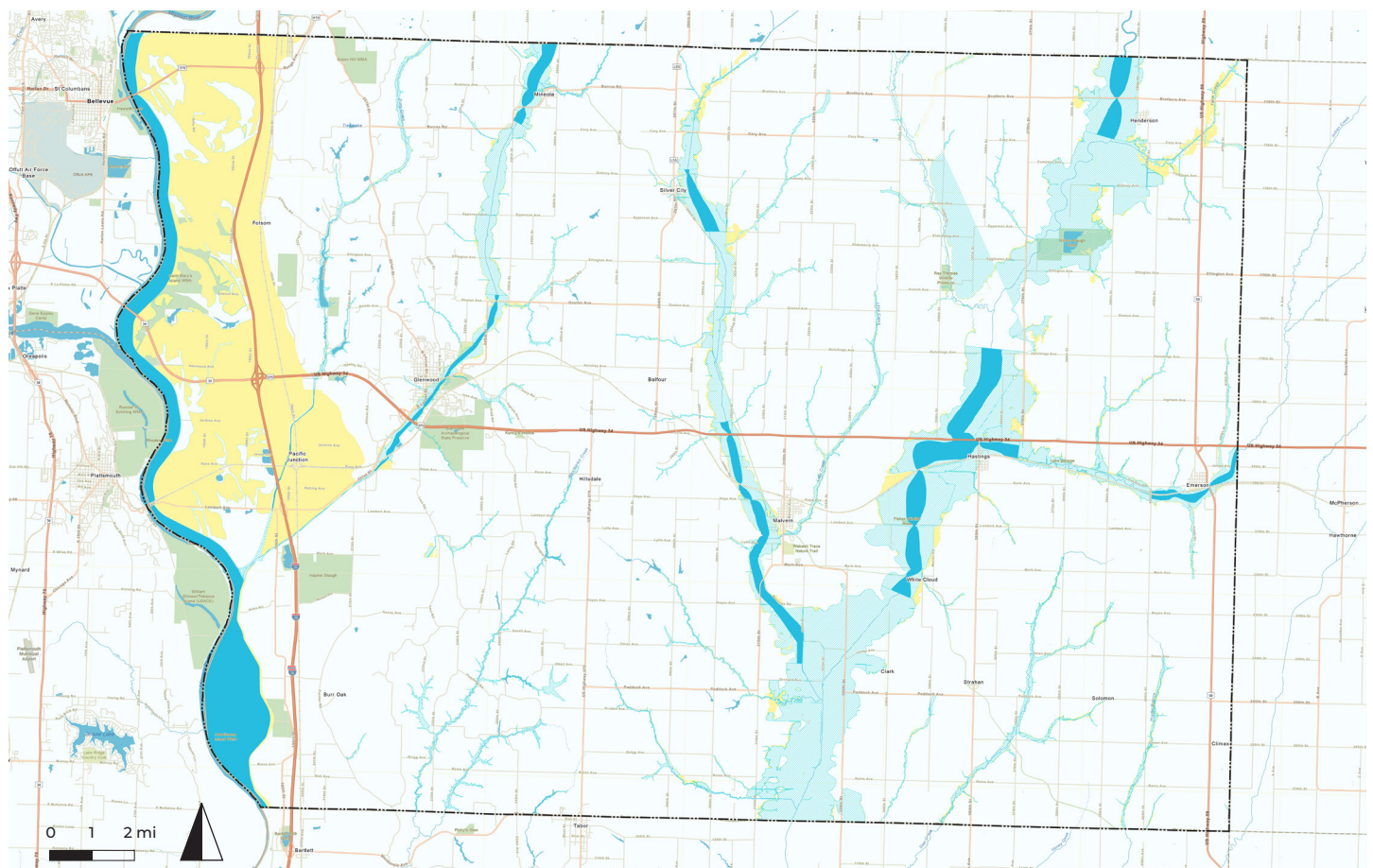
Future Land Use

Key Considerations

Floodplain in Mills County

The Future Land Use Plan considers the impact of stream corridors and the floodplain in creating new land use designations. Figure 1.12 depicts the areas of Mills County within the 100- and 500-year floodplain, including land along the Missouri River, Keg Creek, Silver Creek, and East Nishnabotna River. The 100-year floodplain includes land with a 1% chance of flooding each year, while the 500-year floodplain is land with a 0.2% chance of flooding in a given year. Any development within the floodplain requires a Floodplain Development Permit and is subject to the terms of the Floodplain Management Regulations.

Figure 1.12 // Floodplain Map



-  Mills County Boundary
-  Incorporated Cities
-  Floodway
-  100-Year Floodplain
-  500-Year Floodplain



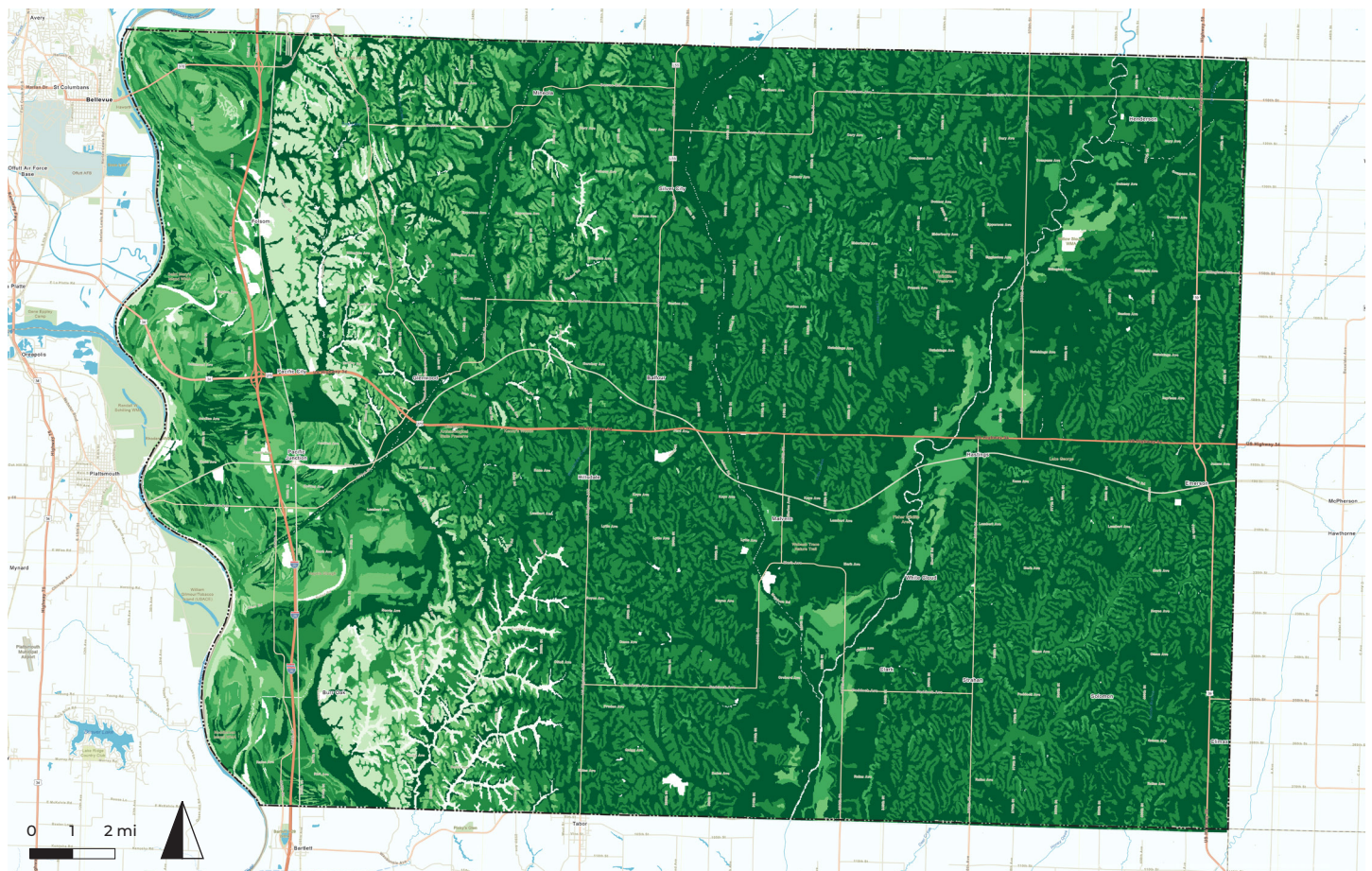
Future Land Use

Key Considerations

Crop Productivity

Mills County is rich with agricultural land, providing the foundation for the county's economy and around 11% of the state's gross domestic product annually. The highest valued commodities in the county include corn and soybeans. The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides a National Commodity Crop Productivity Index (NCCPI) to rank soil capability to produce crops without irrigation. NCCPI productivity ratings range from 0.01 to 1, with 1 being the most productive soil. Figure 1.13 shows that the majority of Mills County is highly ranked for crop production, according to the NCCPI, with the most fertile regions along the riverbeds of Silver Creek and the Nishnabotna River.

Figure 1.13 // Crop Productivity Index Map



US National Commodity Crop Productivity Index (NCCPI)

▬ Mills County Boundary

0 - 0.1	0.551 - 0.7
0.101 - 0.25	0.701 - 0.85
0.251 - 0.4	0.851 - 1
0.401 - 0.55	

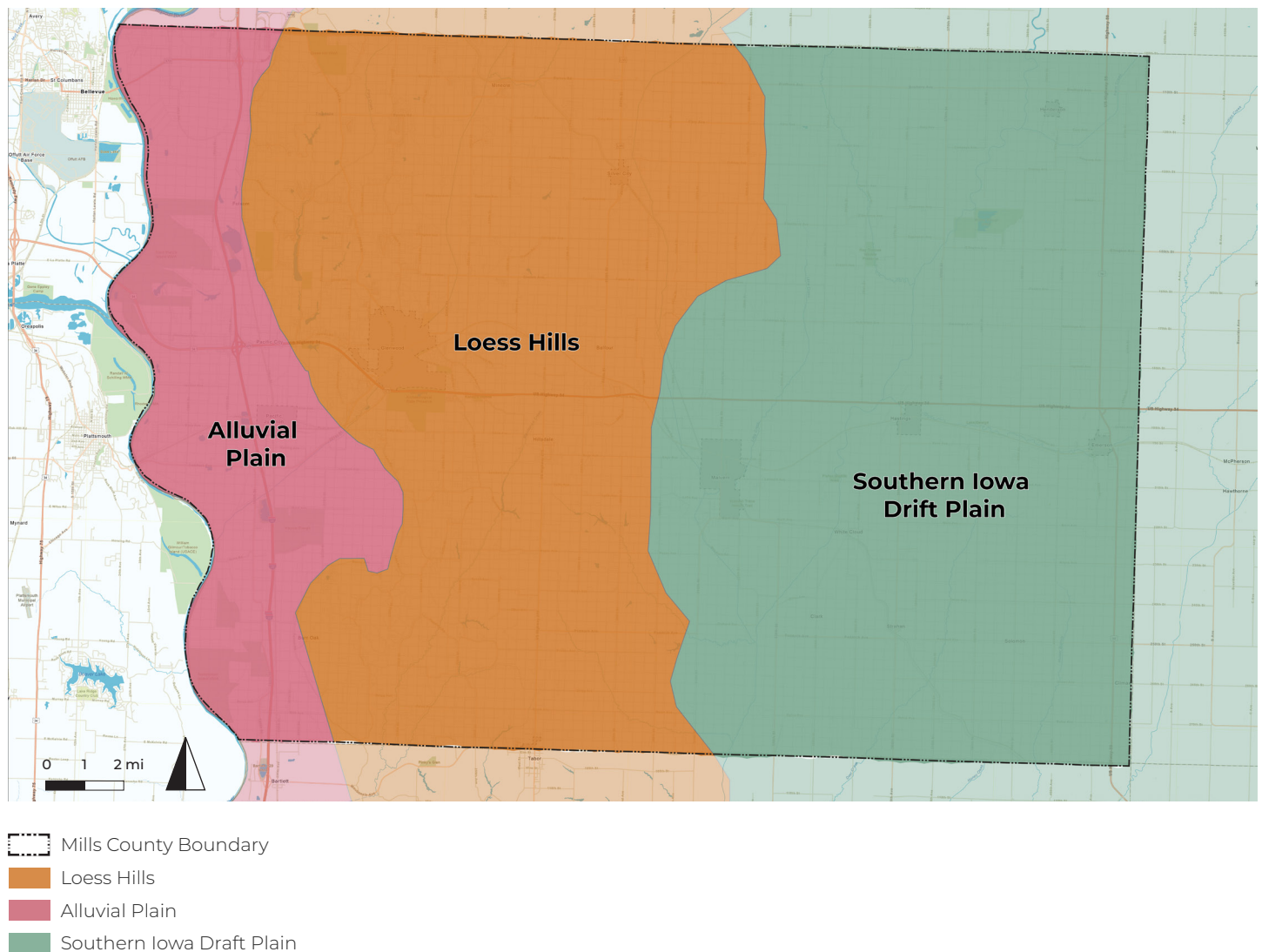
Future Land Use

Key Considerations

Landscape Features Map

There are three major geological features within Mills County: the Alluvial Plain along the immediate Missouri River Valley, the Loess Hills, and the Southern Iowa Drift Plain on the eastern side of the county. The Loess Hills are a key defining landform impacting land use decision-making in Mills County. The Loess Hills are one of Iowa's most distinctive landscapes and border the Missouri River valley in the western half of the state. The Loess Hills are composed of alternating peaks and valleys that are composed of a "gritty yellowish to gray tan sediment known as loess (University of Iowa Geological Survey)." Loess is a wind-blown sediment that is highly vulnerable to erosion and collapse, which makes it one of Iowa's most fragile landforms. Care should be taken when land use planning to help protect this valuable and unique natural feature.

Figure 1.14 // Geological Features Map





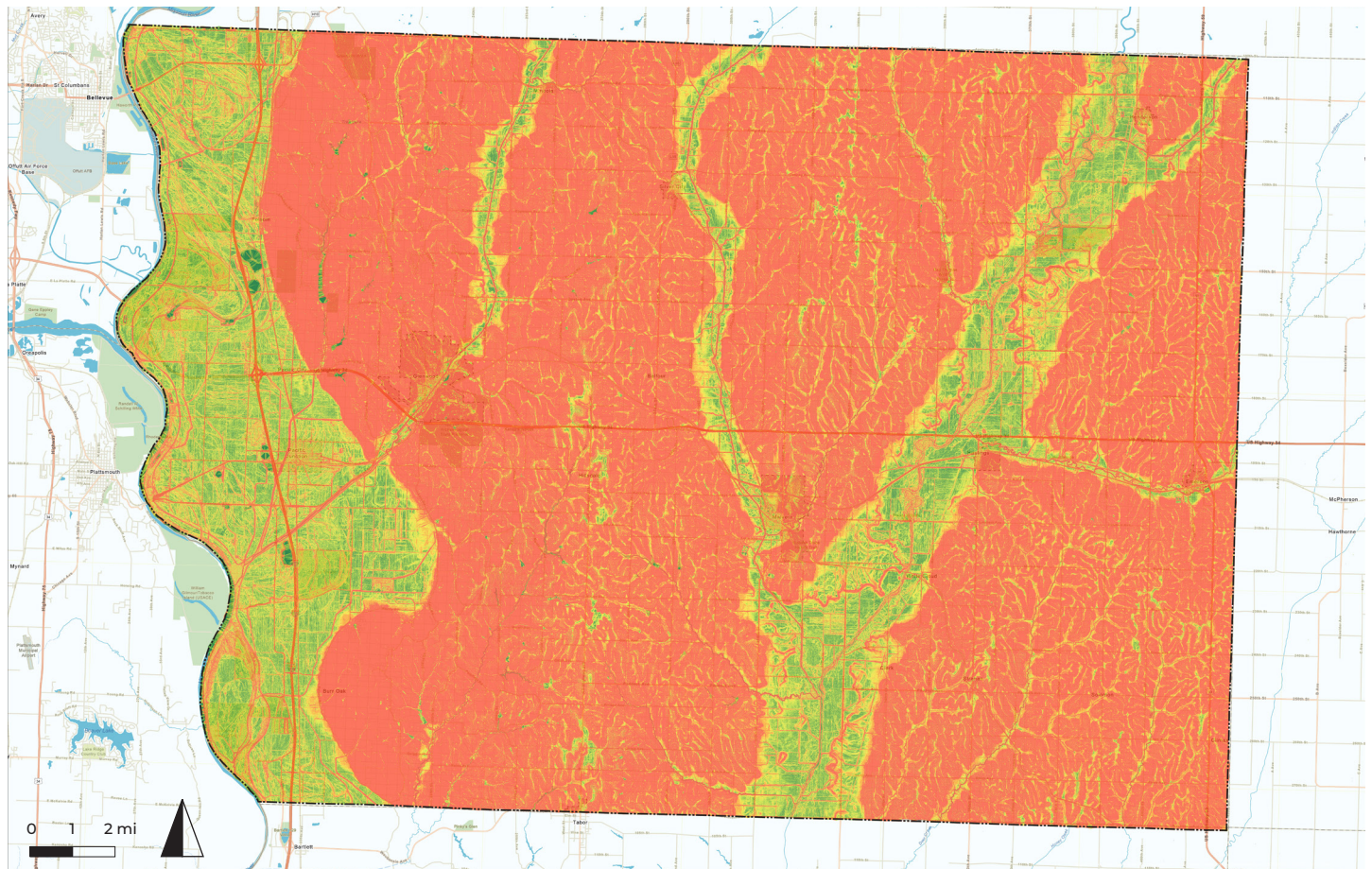
Future Land Use

Key Considerations

Slope + Topography

Slope and topography in Mills County are also important land use factors to consider. A slope analysis was completed and shown below in Figure 1.15. The areas in green and yellow are generally flatter and the areas in orange and red are steep or hilly. In many ways, this map mirrors the Loess Hills natural areas as shown on the previous page, however, hilly terrain extends east into areas of the county outside the Loess Hills area. Development on areas with steeper slopes can be challenging, more expensive, and contribute to soil erosion and water quality issues. Slope should be considered when planning for new land use in Mills County.

Figure 1.15 // Slope Map



- Mills County Boundary
- Low Slope (0-15%)
- Medium Slope (30-45%)
- High Slope (75-90%)

Future Land Use

Land Use Categories

The Future Land Use Plan includes these seven land use categories, defined on the following pages.



Agriculture & Open Space



Parks & Recreation



Public / Semi-Public



Urban Fringe



Rural Residential



Commercial & Business



Business Park/Industrial



Loess Hills Protection Area

Agriculture & Open Space

The Agriculture and Open Space land use category is set aside for agricultural land, undeveloped land, floodplain, stream corridors and buffers, and areas with significant tree cover. The vast majority of land in Mills County is agricultural, and public sentiment within the county is generally to preserve as much of this farmland as possible.

This Future Land Use Plan seeks to preserve existing agricultural land while also acknowledging the potential for solar and wind energy generation on a small portion of this land.



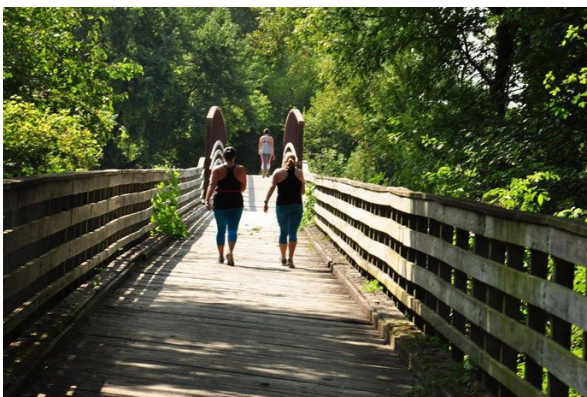


Future Land Use

Land Use Categories

Parks & Recreation

Parks and Recreation land is set aside for public, private, and semi-private recreational uses such as parks, trails, golf courses, greenways, and recreational fields. There are 10 county-managed parks, lakes, wildlife areas, and forests across 1,797 acres of the county. These include Pony Creek Park, the Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve, West Oak Forest, and the Wabash Trace Nature Trail.



Public / Semi-Public

Any land owned or operated by a public or semi-public entity is considered Public / Semi-Public land. This includes land located outside an incorporated area that is owned by the county or any city, school district, university, fire department, or similar public agency. Cemeteries, airports, and public utility facilities are also included in this category. This definition does not include parks and recreation land.

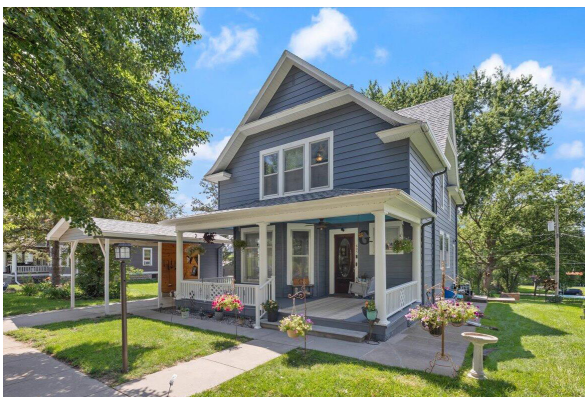


Future Land Use

Land Use Categories

Urban Fringe

This category includes land within a city's identified growth area. Existing land use and zoning within this category consists primarily of agricultural and rural/ estate residential. These areas should remain in their current use with no further development or division until annexed and served by municipal utilities/services. Splits or minor divisions of agricultural land into a limited number of new parcels or lots for residential development may be appropriate and may require approval of adjoining jurisdiction(s) under their two-mile review authority for subdivision plats.



Rural Residential

The Rural Residential category is for traditional low-density single-family dwellings. In areas with adequate public infrastructure housing densities are expected to increase. For the purposes of this category, adequate public infrastructure includes paved roadways, water service, and means for wastewater collection and treatment.

Developments within this category may include religious, educational, institutional uses, child daycare centers, and public and private recreational areas.





Future Land Use

Land Use Categories

Commercial & Business

The Commercial and Business land use category accommodates development such as retail that supports highway traffic, agricultural related retail, agricultural related manufacturing, shipping and distribution facilities, and other business and industrial uses that may be best located in a rural setting outside an urbanized area. Development should be limited to areas with the paved roadway network, water service, and means for wastewater collection and treatment that is adequate to support the proposed uses.



Business Park/Industrial

The Business Park/Industrial category is designed to be located near major highways or along the periphery of urban areas within the county, and offers affordable land options for various industries. Business park and industrial uses can provide many benefits such as increased employment opportunities, a greater consumer base for local businesses, and easy access to nearby communities.



Future Land Use

Land Use Categories

Loess Hills Protection Area

This category is intended to identify an especially important area within the Loess Hill Formation that warrants special attention and protection. Development within this area should include low impact design criteria to this sensitive natural feature.





Future Land Use Overview

The map on the following page (Figure 1.16) shows the future land uses for Mills County.

Agriculture & Open Space

Conservation of agricultural space was paramount in this future land use plan. While some agricultural land is contained within the Urban Fringe category of this plan, nearly all of the area outside these urban growth boundaries was preserved.

Urban Fringe

The Urban Fringe category represents growth boundaries for the larger towns in the county such as Malvern and Glenwood.

Rural Residential

While the Rural Residential category appears to have decreased from the Existing Land Use Map, most of the residential areas are within these urban growth boundaries, and there is slight expansion of residential areas particularly in the region north of Glenwood.

Business Park/Industrial

Three business park locations were identified in the Future Land Use Plan: one surrounding the Rural Commercial + Business area at the I-29 and Highway 34 intersection, and another between Glenwood and Malvern. The third is the Mega Super Site on the eastern boundary of Glenwood, which is approximately 1,600 acres and recognized as development-ready by the Iowa Economic Development Authority's Certified Site Program.

Commercial & Business

The Future Land Use Plan shows an expansion of Commercial and Business land use at the junction of I-29 and Highway 34, the intersection of I-29 and Highway 10 near the northeastern boundary of the county, and around the highway intersection of 34 and 275, east of Glenwood.

Parks and Recreation

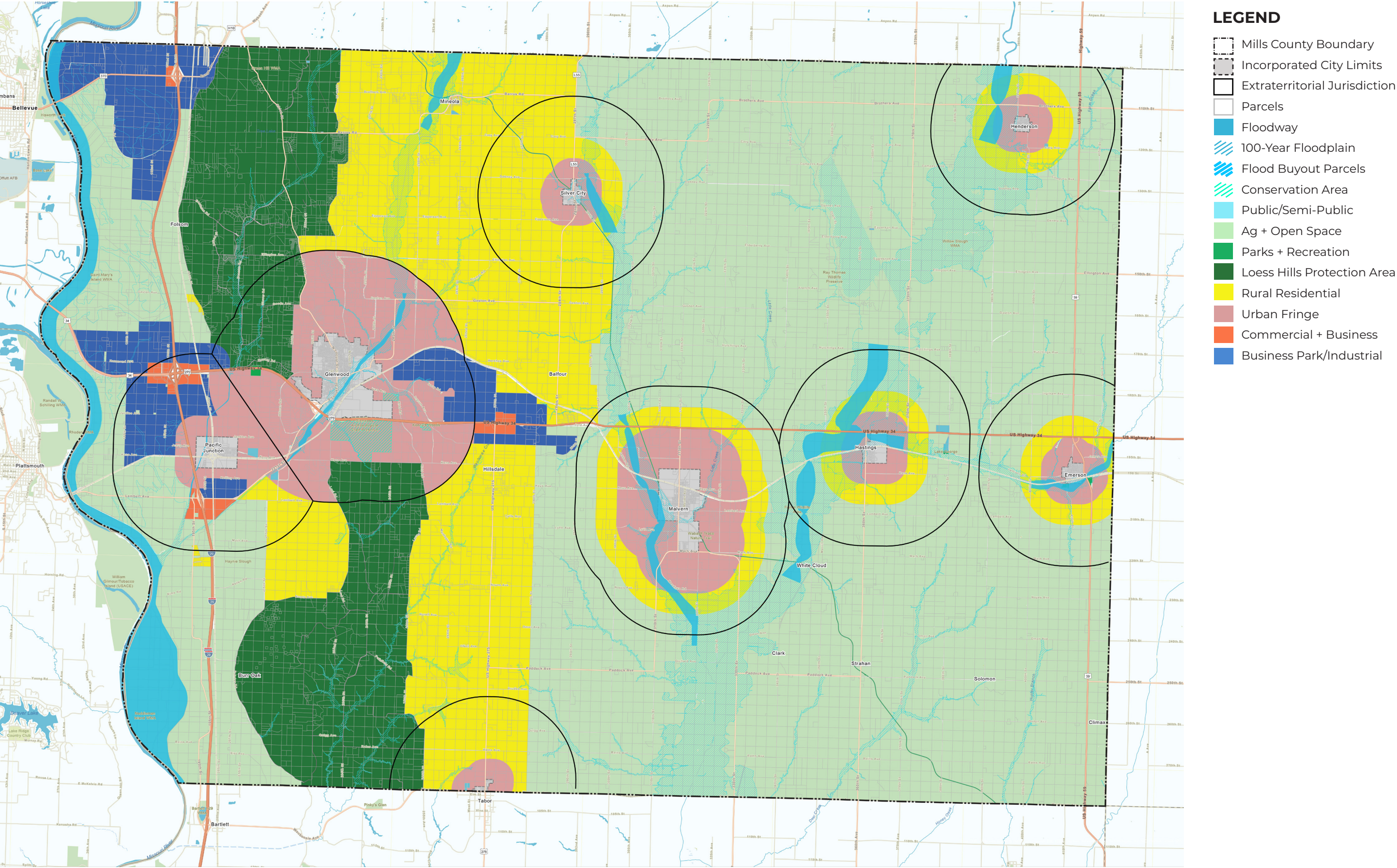
The Parks and Recreation category remains the same, with most parkland located within the Urban Fringe and part of the Wabash Trace Nature Trail.

Table 1.3 // Future Land Use by Acres

	Future Land Use	Acres	Share (%)
	Agriculture & Open Space	161,400	59.7%
	Rural Residential	42,220	15.6%
	Loess Hills Protection Area	30,040	11.1%
	Urban Fringe	23,790	8.8%
	Business Park / Industrial	11,370	4.2%
	Commercial + Business	890	0.3%
	Parks + Recreation	370	0.2%
	Public / Semi-Public	140	0.1%
	Total	270,220	100.0%



Figure 1.16 // Future Land Use Map of Mills County, Iowa



Future Land Use

Zoning Recommendations

Land Use to Zoning Compatibility

A Future Land Use Map is used to help determine the appropriate zoning for property being developed. Each Future Land Use category has one or a series of zoning districts that are compatible or partially compatible with that land use category. The zoning compatibility table below shows the relationship between the future land use categories and Mills County's existing zoning districts. Zoning districts have been listed as either compatible ("C") or partially compatible ("PC") within each of the corresponding land use categories.

The table should be used as the basis for determining the appropriate zoning district(s) for land that is being considered for a rezoning. If the zoning desired for a given property is incompatible with its land use designation, the designation on future land use map should be first amended accordingly. In certain situations, an update or amendment to this matrix may be warranted to address changes in development patterns or revisions to the County's zoning code regulations.

Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances

The County's zoning and subdivision ordinances should be reviewed and updated to address the changes proposed in this Future Land Use Plan. Special attention should be given to revising the list of uses permitted in each zoning district along with the desired development standards.

Table 1.4 // Land Use and Zoning Compatibility Table

		Future Land Use Categories							
		Agricultural Open Space	Urban Fringe	Rural Residential	Business Park/Industrial	Commercial & Business	Parks & Recreation	Public / Semi-Public	Loess Hills Protection Area
Zoning Districts	AG - Agricultural	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
	AR - Agricultural / Residential	PC	PC	C					PC
	LH - Loess Hills Conservation Development	C	PC	PC			C		C
	V - Village		PC	PC	PC	C			
	CC - Community Convenience				C	C			
	CH - Commercial Highway Oriented				C	C			
	I - Industrial				C	PC			
	OS - Greenway / Open Space Conservation	C	PC	PC	PC	PC	C	PC	C
	GP - Grading Permit Overlay	C	PC	PC	PC	PC	C	PC	C
	PUD - Planned Unit Development	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC	PC
	CO - Corridor Overlay				C	C			



Recommendations for Future Land Use

Goals + Policies

GOAL 1

Mills County should encourage and focus rural residential expansion in key areas as identified in the Future Land Use Plan.

POLICY #1:

Promote and support new residential development to those areas identified on the Future Land Use Plan and discourage single-family rural subdivisions in areas that fall within the Agriculture + Open Space category.

POLICY #2:

Any new subdivisions should be designed to accommodate future development including providing through street connections as may be necessary to ensure the adjoining properties can be accessed and developed.

GOAL 2

Commercial expansion should be supported around highway interchanges.

POLICY #1:

Preserve areas near key interchanges and intersections for the limited expansion of Commercial and Business future land use development.

POLICY #2:

Require new commercial and business development to connect to and be accessed by paved roads, and require minor subdivisions, comprised of no more than 3 separate lots, to share a direct driveway onto surfaced roads, based on surrounding land uses and traffic counts.

POLICY #3:

New commercial and business developments and related subdivisions should be designed to accommodate future development including providing through street connections as may be necessary to ensure the adjoining properties can be accessed and developed.



Recommendations for Future Land Use

Goals + Policies

GOAL 3

Utility-scale solar can be positioned in strategic locations to promote economic growth while preserving land.

POLICY #1:

Work closely with Mills County Conservation, historic preservation groups, and other partners to protect and preserve ecologically sensitive land uses and historic sites and landforms throughout the county.

GOAL 4

Follow best practices for growth and development.

POLICY #1:

Encourage development proposed within the Urban Fringe, infill development and rehabilitation of existing properties with the ability to annex into nearby cities and connect to city water and sanitary sewer service.

POLICY #2:

Development near ecologically sensitive land features should utilize buffers from streams and wetlands and avoid development within the floodplain.

POLICY #3:

Ensure development, uses and activities within the Loess Hills do not negatively impact this natural formation.

POLICY #4:

Maintain Agriculture + Open Space as the dominant land use type in the unincorporated Mills County, outside of the Urban Fringe and Rural Residential areas.

POLICY #5:

Reduce potential conflicts between agricultural land uses and other land uses through buffering, setbacks, or other creative strategies.

POLICY #6:

Update the County's zoning regulations to reflect the recommendations within the Future Land Use Plan and complete a comprehensive review and update to the Corridor Overlay District to ensure that the regulations meet the needs and goals of the County.