



## CALENDAR YEARS 2023 & 2024 POLICY AGENDA: WORK PLAN

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### Calendar Years 2023 & 2024 Policy Agenda:

#### **1. Commence Construction of River City Renaissance Hotel and Main Street Xperience; Make the RCR a Permanent State of Mind & Tagline Through Continued Organizational Partnering, Structuring, and Financing**

**Primarily Responsible:** RCR Committee, Including Mayor, Councilperson Adams, City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator, Recreation Superintendent, and Development Services Director

**Staff Interpretation:** Work with developer to ensure timely groundbreaking and commencement of construction of the Hyatt Place Hotel and renovation of the Southbridge Mall into the Main Street Xperience family entertainment complex. Develop a process, working with consultants as necessary and within an approved budget, to create branding and organizational infrastructure around the “River City Renaissance”.

**Action:** The City has largely completed the items related to the Hyatt Place Hotel and the Main Street Xperience that are within its power to complete at this time. The City plans to work with the developer to achieve timely groundbreaking and construction for both developments. The hotel is envisioned as an 18-month construction period following groundbreaking, while the mall renovation to the Main Street Xperience is expected to take about 9 months.

City staff and officials plan to work within the established RCR Committee to develop plans for branding and new organizational infrastructure. We expect the branding activity to occur as part of an overall City branding initiative that would be planned for in the FY24 budget and then get underway in mid-2023. We expect this branding activity, likely to be done with an outside consultant, to occur over about a 12-month period, allowing ample time and opportunities for stakeholder and public input. Organizational work, which could involve bringing additional partners to the table and investigating possible new organizational structures, will be conducted in an inclusive way, ensuring a broad, progressive, and forward-looking vision in harmony with the vision expressed by the City Council in the Strategic Plan for calendar years 2023 and 2024. We expect the majority of the initial organizational work to be complete within a 24-month time period, but continuing work on organizational partnering, communication, and promotion of Mason City will be ongoing for the long term.

## **2. Get Highway 122 West Funded Through State and Federal Resources and Coordinate on Initial Planning & Design Work**

**Primarily Responsible:** City Administrator, City Engineer, Operations & Maintenance Director, Development Services Director, and Airport Manager

**Staff Interpretation:** The Iowa Highway 122 improvements include the Pierce to Monroe Avenue corridor (henceforth to be referred to as the “122 Mercy Project”) and the Lark Avenue to Winnebago Way corridor (henceforth to be referred to as the “122 West Project”). Staff will focus on pursuing all sources of available funding, through continued planning efforts with the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT), utilizing preliminary engineering and plan preparation with cost estimates as a basis for satisfying regulatory agency requirements.

### **Action:**

#### 122 West Project:

- Pursue National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) clearance as a clear commitment to the project, then revisit through a presentation to the Iowa Transportation Commission during their 2023 meeting in Mason City.
- City takes the lead by retaining the services of a consultant to perform preliminary engineering and the preparation of preliminary plans to be utilized for the purpose of pursuing additional outside funding opportunities.
- Begin to identify City project funds.
- Identify and include the project in the current City Comprehensive Plan.

Staff plans to submit for NEPA clearance in August 2023 and present again to the Iowa Transportation Commission in October 2023. Construction is expected to begin in around 5 years and will take 3 construction seasons to complete.

#### 122 Mercy Project:

- Retain the services of a consultant to survey, design, and prepare final bidding documents for an Iowa DOT January 2025 letting. Work with the Iowa DOT to develop a pre-design agreement. These items are expected to be brought forward for City Council approval in December 2022.
- Work throughout early and mid-2023 on items includes: survey and base mapping, public information meeting, completion of preliminary design, submission for NEPA clearance, and submission of plans to private utility companies.
- Staff expects to prepare for the construction stage of the project with a pre-construction agreement with DOT, completion of final plan documents, and entering into a funding agreement with DOT in the latter half of 2024, culminating in a DOT letting of the project in January 2025.

### **3. Support Design & Implement Destination Iowa Improvements, with Completion of Initiative No Later Than December 31, 2026**

**Primarily Responsible:** City Administrator, City Engineer, Operations & Maintenance Director, Executive Assistant, Deputy Clerk, Park Board, North Iowa Human Powered Trails, and Active Living & Transportation Commission.

Staff anticipates the need for a broad and inclusive coalition to successfully complete an initiative of this scope and complexity, so it should be anticipated that additional staff members and outside groups will be involved during the planning and implementation processes for the improvements.

**Staff Interpretation:** Specific to the Project, the following categories are established relative to this item:

- a) Scrip Road Conversion and Illinois Bridge Improvement
- b) Prairieland Trail Connector
- c) Shelter and Trail Facilities
- d) Highline Trail
- e) Mason City Riverwalk
- f) Bike Park and Pump Track
- g) Murphy Park Trail and Bridge
- h) Bouldering Equipment
- i) Single Track Trails
- j) Crossing Safety Improvements

Description of each of the categories:

- a) **Scrip Road Conversion and Illinois Bridge Improvement** – Birch Drive (historically known as Scrip Road) was deteriorating and no longer necessary. The city council elected to tear up the dilapidated pavement and to turn the scenic route next to the river into a bike trail that will serve numerous free recreational purposes (trail head, kayak start/end point, bike path, fishing access, etc.). On the bridge next to this location the sidewalk is very narrow and does not allow for bikes to pass each other safely or for bike riders to stay on their bike. As part of this project to build safe connections to all destinations the bridge sidewalk will be expanded to serve a proper path for all individuals in the area including students traveling to and from the 3 schools within 3 blocks of the bridge.
- b) **Prairieland Trail Connector**–Prairieland Trail travels the distance of the county to the southwest border and will be interconnected with other regional trails. Unfortunately, this trail stops outside Mason City limits forcing riders to park at a small trail head to use the great regional asset. With a connector in place, individuals will be able to travel from Clear Lake to Mason City to the Cerro Gordo County limits without leaving dedicated off-street bike trails provided currently by the local governments.

- c) **Shelter and Trail Facilities** – These improvements will be in close proximity to the Bike Park, High Line Trail and Single Track Trails. They will include wayfinding signage, benches and picnic tables, public art, restroom facilities, shelters for gatherings, and educational materials. These improvements will ensure that visitors can spend a long, enjoyable time on the trails and stay comfortable and entertained.
- d) **Highline Trail** – The land for this trail has already been purchased with previous funding and is approximately 3.25 miles in length extending between the trails in Georgia Hanford Park located in the far southeast region of the city with the trails in the Lime Creek Nature Trail in the northeast. The former rail line through the center of the city presents an opportunity for a signature greenway feature with unique park development possibilities on former elevated rail lines. The trail will provide extensive interconnection between many trails and areas of Mason City facilitating movement to and from visitor destinations like Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Architecture, the Music Man Square Museum, the MacNider Art Museum, Downtown, the Riverwalk, the Bike Park, etc. Along the High Line Trail are four bridges, that provide a unique experience of moving through the city free of traffic and enjoy trail amenities along the beauty of the trees near Winnebago River and Willow Creek. The enhanced trail will include features like lookout areas, benches, art installations, and educational components.
- e) **Mason City Riverwalk** – The Riverwalk improvements will create a relaxing gathering place in the downtown in close proximity to countless new housing, entertainment, restaurant, and retail offerings including the soon to be constructed Hotel and Conference center. The space will have educational and artistic components celebrating the community and engaging spaces for all ages of visitors. Additionally, it will be designed with a closeness to nature to create a one-of-a-kind experience and act as a gateway. The Riverwalk will invite people to embrace the outdoors of North Iowa and welcome those visitors into downtown Mason City.
- f) **Bike Park and Pump Track** - The Bike Park and Pump Track will feature a series of trails and facilities designed specifically for use by bicycles. Riders of all ages and skill levels will be able to have a fun, safe, and healthy experience while improving bike handling skills and confidence. The park will feature many components that will include ladder bridging, skinnies, log overs, rock features, drop zones, progressive jump zones and a pump track. This facility located near numerous single track trails along the Winnebago will be one of a kind in the Midwest.
- g) **Murphy Park Trail and Bridge** – This paved trail and bridge will create a key connection through a beautiful natural environment between the new Scrip Road Trail and the rest of the city's trails and amenities. Currently, the neighborhoods and park areas to the east of Illinois Street have a difficult time

accessing East Park and the Winnebago trails and often must come in conflict with or ride along busy roads. This strategic addition to the trail system will construct a paved path through the park adjacent to the river and build a pedestrian bridge over the Winnebago River to the Muse Norris Softball complex and single track trails.

- h) **Bouldering Equipment** - Bouldering (free climbing on small rock formations) is gaining in popularity and the installation next to the Winnebago River whitewater launch, the single track trails, and the Bike Park will allow for visitors that are bike enthusiasts or kayakers to take a quick reprieve off their bikes or kayaks and enjoy a different outdoor activity. Bouldering is accessible to a wide range of ages and abilities and will aesthetically blend with the rocky out cropping in the surrounding landscape. The cost will include fall protection.
- i) **Single Track Trails** - New Single Track Trail areas will be built throughout Mason City (near existing paved trail sections, in promising public areas with elevation changes, and as connections to current single track trail areas). These new trails will provide miles of trail that can be accessed within blocks of the Winnebago River and with easy access from trail area to trail area on bike paths. The amount of well-designed trails with nearby amenities (like the Bike Park and downtown) will create an experience unique to Mason City and create a new Destination for Biking in the State of Iowa. While the trails are not the most expensive part of the grant, they are critical to creating the vision of this grant. The way the single track trails are integrated into the community and the ability to create trails for all skill levels will make them the gem of the Midwest.
- j) **Crossing Safety Improvements** - While most crossings will be able to be made without conflict with traffic, some traffic crossings are unavoidable. Crossing Safety Improvements will be made in areas with traffic crossings that are along bike paths. These will include lights, early warning devices, and audible crossing indicators. Due to the increased ridership from the grant project, it will be important to provide more visible protections and warnings at these areas. These improvements will also provide more comfort for riders using the trails to have confidence using the crossing with people of all abilities and ages.

**Action:**

For each of the project categories, the tentative actions are as follows:

- Design, Bid, Let and Approve Contracts for all components of the project
  - Obtain all regulatory approvals
  - Secure agreement(s) with County or other Agencies
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- a) Scrip Road Conversion and Illinois Bridge Improvement: Develop plans and specifications for a Spring 2023 letting; Project construction 2023 – June through October

- b) Prairieland Trail Connector: Survey and design leading up to Spring 2024 construction
- c) Shelter and Trail Facilities: As needs are discussed and determined - begin January 2023 through 2024
- d) Highline Trail: WHKS will survey in December 2022; involve user groups – anticipate 2024 completion
- e) Mason City Riverwalk: Need additional feedback from users of design options – met with hotel architect and WHKS to define area
- f) Bike Park and Pump Track: Requires an architect, additional feedback from Backyard Trails representative Ken Barker; met with potential designer/builders
- g) Murphy Park Trail and Bridge: Anticipated 2026 – most likely the last project in the categories
- h) Bouldering Equipment: Consists of ordering ‘play equipment’ and type of fall protection (rubberized?); order in spring 2023 to install July 2023
- i) Single Track Trails: Commence construction immediately continuing through 2026 until complete; priority MCHS/Evans Preserved area first – met with consultant and established relationship
- j) Crossing Safety Improvements: Hire contractor to do one at a time, starting with 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Spring 2023





#### **4. Help All Neighborhoods Throughout Mason City to Flourish Through Dedication of City Resources Toward Infrastructure and Housing, Including Creation of an Internal Task Force on Nuisance Abatement & Blight Remediation**

**Primarily Responsible:** City Administrator, Development Services Director, Housing Inspector, Code Enforcement Officers, Police Chief, Fire Chief, HR Director; partnerships with Habitat for Humanity, Landlords' Association, Corridor Housing Development Corporation, and Ministerial Alliance.

**Staff Interpretation:** City Council has determined that this is their highest priority. Staff needs to provide status reports to Council on a regular basis. Resources, including budget and staffing, will be focused on meeting this goal. Continued reliance on competent outside legal assistance is required. Stronger focus on problem properties and property owners/landlords, with zero tolerance for serial violators. Code Enforcement staff needs to be supported by clerical help with property research, site monitoring and gathering legal information for court. Need to determine infrastructure needs in targeted neighborhoods.

**Action:**

Formalize and organize Blight Task Force. Solicit participation from outside agencies. Hire intern to provide clerical and research assistance. Ensure that FY24 budget is adequate to meet goals. Identify priority properties and property owners, and create a plan for addressing them. Create an interactive map to show Council and the public the status of efforts and examples of success. Work with the attorney to prioritize court efforts to ensure successful outcomes.

Staff expects to undertake the following steps in the coming months:

- Staff determines agencies to invite and organizes first meeting for early December.
- Complete work on the Interactive Map (which is already in process).
- Review current work assignments with attorney and prioritize efforts for 2023.
- Prepare for FY24 budget process with CIP infrastructure projects in targeted neighborhoods (West Downtown).
- Plan for first Task Force meeting.
- Hire intern (to start after first of the year).
- Hold first Task Force meeting; create calendar for regular Task Force meetings, and consider what will be regularly discussed on each agenda.
- Review ongoing enforcement and court-level efforts.
- Begin identification of priority properties/owners.
- Research resources for property renovations.
- Prepare to consider general fund budget needs for FY24 to meet task force goals.

To meet this goal, stronger efforts to require compliance with serial violators is needed. The Task Force will work with the attorney to strengthen these compliance efforts.

## 5. Expand Housing Options and Implement Housing Study Findings

**Primarily Responsible:** City Administrator, Deputy City Administrator, Development Services Director, HR Director, and Museum Director; Corridor Housing Development Corporation and other outside developers & partners.

**Staff Interpretation:** Finalize the 2021-2022 Housing Study, which has not yet come to the City Council for finalization due to a delay in the consultant completing subarea plans and the project website. Staff has determined that it will be best to bring the report to Council for consideration at the soonest time possible, with the subarea plans serving as addenda to be considered & adopted later.

Chapter 4 of the study includes the following action items:

- a) Increase diversity of housing options
- b) Residential improvements should follow infrastructure improvements
- c) Target new development of affordable/workforce units on infill lots
- d) Expand availability of contractors, include attracting new contractors & developers
- e) Create housing corporation to fill the gap in affordable housing development
- f) Review/update ordinances, where necessary
- g) Seek ways to revise review processes

The study sets out a goal of developing a net of 522 new housing units in the next 10 years. This is significantly above the number of net new units developed in Mason City in the past 10 years, even including the 100+ units added by The River housing development. Further exacerbating the issues is that the community lost around 160 units in the floods of 2008. The necessity of stepped-up code enforcement efforts will likely include further demolitions of dilapidated units, raising further the number of new units needed. On the upside, great progress has been made in recent years in attracting new housing unit development; including The River II, Federal Rowhomes, Good Shepherd Independent Living, and various upper-story projects in the downtown, over 140 new units are under construction or committed at the current time. Additional development is slated to occur at the Legacy at 19, the former Mason City Country Club.

While the community has needs across the entire spectrum of housing types and price points, “missing middle” housing is a particular priority. Strategies to tackle this lack of availability will be centered around rehabilitation of existing housing stock, as the cost of new construction can quickly price out those of more modest economic means. Staff also sees expansion of downtown upper-story housing to be a critical piece of the puzzle; downtown housing has the added benefit of driving demand for downtown shopping and service options, fueling a vibrant commercial sector and enhanced sense of place.

**Action:** Staff sees a number of areas for action:

- Corridor Housing Development Corporation- get this set up and operating within 6 months. The City Council allocated \$1M of the City’s American



Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds toward this new initiative, so the new organization will start with a reasonable nest egg to be leveraged for the benefit of the community.

- Housing TIF areas- the City has not used Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to this point for housing development, but staff believes this needs to be considered as part of a suite of available tools to encourage housing development of the scale needed to construct 522 net new units over the next 10 years. Based on discussions with developers, staff envisions setting up residential urban renewal plans for target areas, with these plans being drafted and finalized between now and November 2023, to allow for certification of any such debts with the December 1, 2023 certification to the County Auditor.
- YWCA Redevelopment- staff is currently working on an emergency grant application to the Iowa Economic Development Authority to provide for funding for renovating the former YWCA building at 2 South Adams Avenue. The initial project will provide 3 new housing units, while a proposed condominium arrangement to allow for third-party redevelopment of the west portion of the building could produce an additional 10 units. It is hoped that development on the initial 3 units could begin in the next year, with the remaining 10 beginning development in 2-3 years.
- Parker Heights Redevelopment- the area immediately west of the core downtown area is in need of significant redevelopment attention, and the City has submitted an application to the Home Rehabilitation Block Grant Program that could bring significant grant funds to bear in addressing issues in that neighborhood. Timetable on those improvements is pending State of Iowa award of funds, so is unknown at the current time.
- Removing Barriers to Downtown Housing Development- the City Council allocated \$1M of ARPA funds toward a new Building Renovation/Life Safety (BuRLS) program to defray the costs of meeting the fire code for multi-family housing projects, particularly in the downtown area. This program has been well-received and very successful thus far but cannot continue beyond the initial \$1M allocation without identification of a significant on-going funding stream. Staff plans to work to identify funding stream(s) for making this initiative permanent for the FY24 budget process, if possible. Other future initiatives related to encouraging downtown housing on a large scale may include downtown covered parking availability, which could be at as large of scale as a downtown parking ramp, or potentially at a somewhat smaller scale initially.
- Madison School Redevelopment- The Mason City Community School District owns 2.2 developable acres at the former site of the Madison School (located between 26<sup>th</sup> St. SW & 27<sup>th</sup> St. SW and South Madison & Jefferson Avenues). Habitat for Humanity has been working to purchase the site from the school

district but would welcome other development partners for full build-out of the site, and City staff will likely be involved in coordinating with any market-rate developers interested in the site.

- Other multi-family developments- City staff is in ongoing conversations with several developers interested in multi-family developments. As mentioned above, these developments may require a re-evaluation of residential TIF and other new housing development strategies.
- Single-family residential development- the community currently has very limited supply of single-family spec homes. While some single-family residential development continues, this is an area for further examination and discussion in the future.

## **6. See to Full Utilization of the Multi-Purpose Arena in the Summer Months**

**Primarily Responsible:** City Administrator, Recreation Superintendent, Cemetery Superintendent, HR Director, Rockhouse Productions, North Iowa Fights, NIACC

**Staff Interpretation:** The City controls scheduling of the arena for 10 weeks during the summer. Seek to diversify events, such as different genres of music, family events, mixed martial arts (MMA), and Recreation Department programming. The goal is to have 4 major events in Summer 2023 and increase to 6 major events in Summer 2024.

**Action:** Staff sees several critical & foundational issues to successfully address this issue in a sustainable way: First, establish a solid foundation with Rockhouse Productions to help promote the arena and bring in national named talent, along with family entertainment to perform in Mason City. Second, establish a routing stop for national events and acts. Finally, provide a quality product that will fill the arena. Implementation of increased arena bookings will begin in mid-December 2022 with potential dates from promoters and event directors, with summer calendar marketing and ticket sales rollouts in early 2023.

Additional staffing may need to be considered to accommodate this approach. Also, the City Council will be asked to consider a larger events budget in the FY24 and future proposed budgets.