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# INTRODUCTION



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A complex of deep-rooted tallgrass prairies, wetlands, and oak savannas once dominated Iowa's rolling landscape. Over the past 150 years, the US's western expansion led to the conversion of this exceptionally fertile terrain into some of the most productive farmland in the world. Centers of commerce and population pepper this golden landscape – places filled with energy and vision, and defined by their commitment to work, family, and community.

One of the most robust manifestations of these characteristics — and the most populous example — sits near Iowa's geographic center. Greater Des Moines, the state's capital and environs, includes seventeen communities, parts of four counties, and a population of just under 500,000 residents.

Finance, insurance, and biotechnology industries dominate the economic landscape of Greater Des Moines, while farmland still frames this vital seat of policy, job growth, and culture.

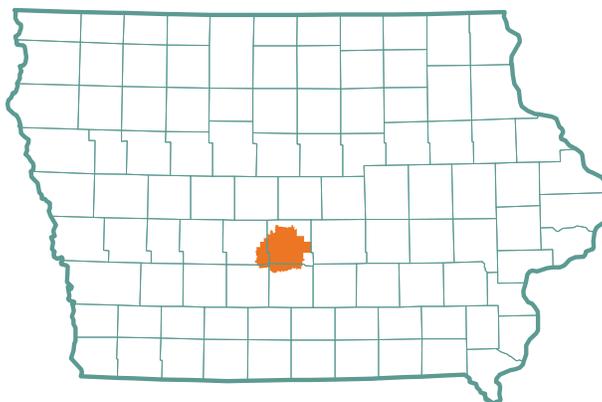
Today, Greater Des Moines is experiencing a renaissance. Concerted efforts on many fronts have led to vital placemaking projects and policies that have revitalized, reshaped, and re-envisioned much of the community.

We have attractive gateways; popular parks; ribbons of trails; iconic public art; signature events; rich options for personal and professional growth; and, an ongoing commitment to public health, job creation, and community-building throughout Greater Des Moines.

In the 1990s, *The Book of Lists* named the City of Des Moines one of the fifteen worst places to live in the country. Now, we hear things throughout the region that might have been unimaginable at that time. At the fifth annual 80/35 music festival in July 2012, residents said there is always something to do in Greater Des Moines. They adore the diversity of people and culture, the up-and-coming art and creative scene, and the mix of small town and city life. It keeps getting better, too, with an increasing number of events, more music, additional trails, and a growing focus on sustainability.

In this context, Greater Des Moines is planning ahead. This plan builds on success but also heeds an undoubtedly shifting future, hence the forward-looking title of The Tomorrow Plan.

GREATER DES MOINES  
The Tomorrow Plan Study Area



## THE TIMES ARE CHANGING

The demographics of Greater Des Moines are shifting. Approximately 150,000 Baby Boomers<sup>1</sup> call this region home. As they age, what will this mean for the transportation system, land use, and the placement of homes, businesses, and stores?

At the same time, Greater Des Moines must prepare for the XYZ factor. Those individuals aged 45 and younger — approximately two-thirds of our region’s population — exhibit different lifestyle choices and preferences. They seek communities with a mix of uses within walking distance. They do not necessarily want to own an automobile or own a home.<sup>2</sup>

We also are seeing changes in what a “traditional” household looks like. In another decade, we expect to see as many single person households as multiple person households. Less than half of those between ages 25 and 34 are getting married, and more college graduates are moving back in with their parents after graduation. Furthermore, by 2042, there will not be a majority race in the country. Will this lead to neighborhoods and schools that are more diverse, or will it lead to a clash of cultures? Will our region be ready for all of these changes?

Factors such as a growing population, changing demographics, uncertain climate forecasting, and the ever-increasing influence of global economics all complicate future predictions while making them all the more necessary. Armed with significant funding, other exceptional existing planning work in the region, and a commitment to work across boundaries, Greater Des Moines has chosen a formidable task: **to craft a plan for a dynamic, vibrant future of lasting value in 2050.**

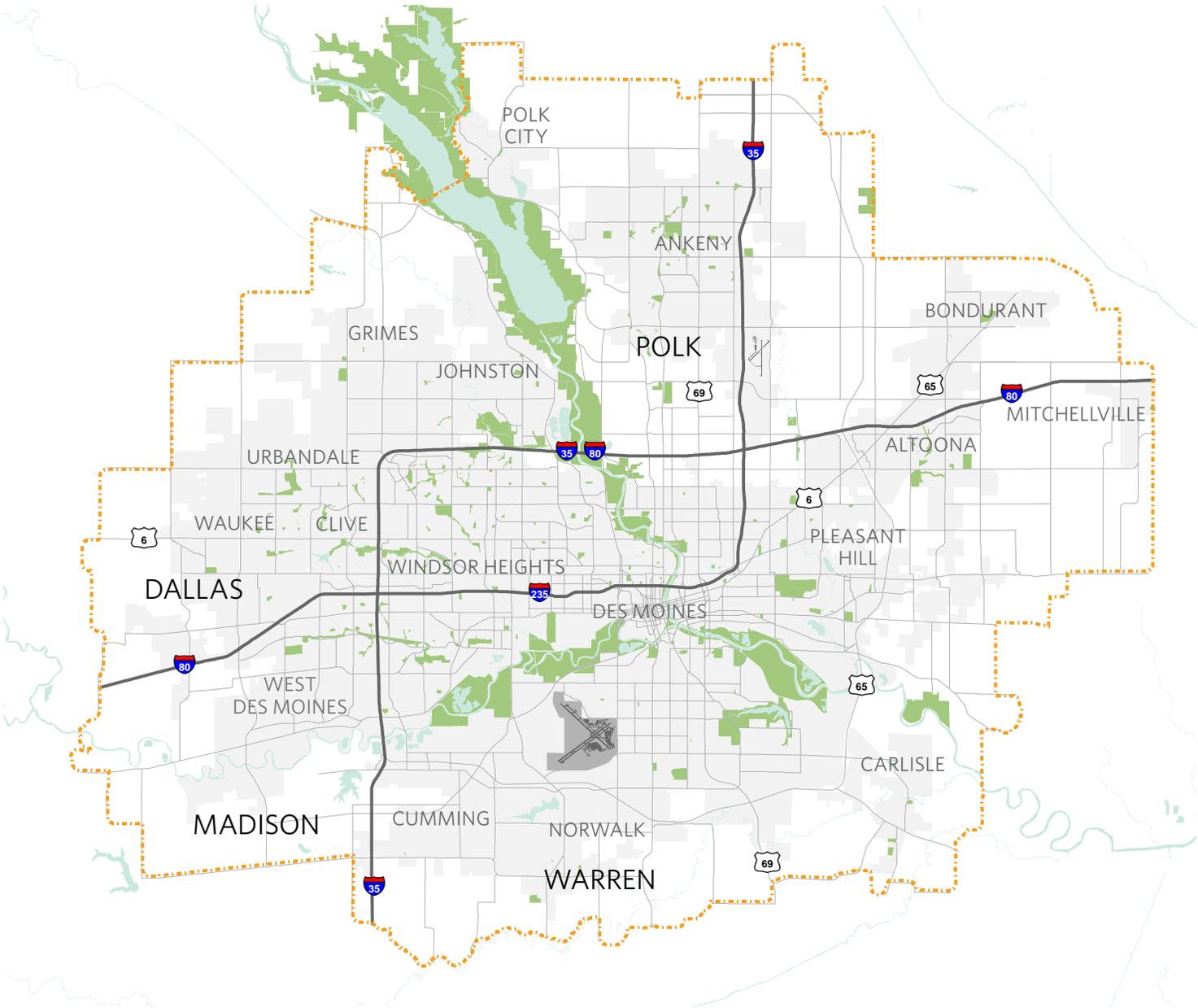
Techniques for developing this plan include:

- Extensive public engagement of thousands of stakeholders from across the region using many tools;
- Comprehensive data gathering and modeling;
- Ongoing engagement with other plans and initiatives across the region; and,
- The translation of these approaches and results into a strategic direction and well-founded implementation plans.

The guiding principles — informed by the public, the technical team, and the Steering Committee — lay out the framework for Greater Des Moines’s long-term future.

These principles honor our position in agriculture and finance while setting the stage for expanding opportunities. They recognize the critical roles of diversity and equity; scope environmental and economic opportunities; and, work at the human scale to spur analysis of what it takes to work together as a region and of what it takes to leverage the many social, economic, and environmental assets of the area.

As you read The Tomorrow Plan, seek to understand the process, but also focus on the role(s) you and the organizations with which you are involved can take to move strategies and initiatives forward. The document is rich with ideas, achievable steps, and useful tools to further the vitality and substance of Greater Des Moines as we approach 2050.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A GREENER GREATER DES MOINES

1. Allow for sustainable alternatives that offer flexibility and that enhance mixed uses, walkability/accessibility, and sense of place through zoning, land use planning, and development.
2. Support existing neighborhoods by redeveloping/repurposing underused and vacant properties and by cultivating public-private partnerships.
3. Increase housing and transportation options while maintaining neighborhood character and enhancing sense of place.
4. Improve efficiency, equity, quality, and performance through a concerted effort to regionalize infrastructure services and standards where appropriate and practical.
5. Maintain, enhance, and connect park, recreation, and conservation opportunities to improve the health of natural resources and people.
6. Preserve agricultural lands and natural systems by encouraging infill development.
7. Increase the region's commitment to economic development and job creation.
8. Enable local stakeholders to work together to achieve regional goals while respecting individual institutions.
9. Promote regional approaches to stormwater and flood management.
10. Foster support for the continued evolution of entertainment, culture, and the arts in the region.

## How to Read This Plan

In reading this plan, it is important to note that it is neither a land use plan nor a binding document. Rather, it lays out a strategic direction for Greater Des Moines enriched with high-level but achievable approaches and steps for implementation.

### Planning Process & Context

The opening sections of this plan lay out its purpose and explain the multi-year process of engaging community members, elected leaders, and technical experts to develop the plan's major goals, strategies, and initiatives.

### Goals, Strategies & Initiatives

The next section introduces the four overarching goals of the plan along with the accompanying strategies that can move the region towards our vision. Following this overview of goals and strategies is a more in-depth discussion and rationale for each strategy. The plan also begins to outline potential champions and key steps to bring the plan to fruition.

Accompanying each goal is a regional initiative. Each initiative supports multiple goals and strategies that, when executed, will provide meaningful, measurable progress. Each initiative is, in turn, a collection of implementation steps that can be carried out at the regional level in the near future. The initiatives are lofty but, if tackled as a region, also are achievable.

### Breathing Life into the Plan: Everyday Stewards

This section details what you can do to bring The Tomorrow Plan to life. All too often, the implementation of plans like this falls to government, business leaders, and other civic groups. Rarely do they target individual action. The Tomorrow Plan, through the Everyday Stewards section, provides action plans for all stakeholders. The true strength of The Tomorrow Plan is that it was developed through a grassroots effort, and its success depends on your continued involvement.

### Choose Tomorrow

This section of the plan asks you to continue your support of the plan and our region in general.

### Toolbox for Tomorrow

Throughout the plan, you will see references to technical documents and other resources. These are part of an online toolbox that anyone can access and use. These tools will make implementation considerably simpler and more straightforward. The toolbox will continue to grow over time, as the plan's implementers share lessons learned, as new research becomes available, and as tools are refined.