



Comprehensive Strategic Plan Update
City of Sterling, Illinois



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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Introduction

1. Purpose of the Plan

This Comprehensive Strategic Plan is a blueprint for the short-range and long-range growth and development of the City of Sterling, prepared under the authority of Chapter 65, Division 12 of Illinois Statutes. It is designed to be used by City officials as a policy guide to:

- Direct community development and land use decisions, especially on a neighborhood planning area level;
- Consolidate and direct redevelopment efforts among the many community organizations;
- Focus and stimulate private housing, business, and industrial investment in the community; and
- Outline an implementation program that follows logic and contains achievable, measurable benchmarks.

In addition to providing sound public *policy* guidance, a Comprehensive Strategic Plan should incorporate an inclusive public participation *process* to ensure that its recommendations are as reflective of a broadly supported future vision. Before being adopted by the City Plan Commission and the City Council, a Plan must go through a formal hearing and review process. The City has incorporated other public participation efforts into its process, including focus group interviews and a community vision workshop. This formal, well-publicized process facilitates broad support of plan goals and activities.

Adopting a Comprehensive Strategic Plan is just the first step in directing community growth and redevelopment, and promoting economic development. Subsequent planning efforts must focus on providing direct connections between the Plan's recommendations and actual development. The most effective ways of accomplishing this are to adopt development regulations that directly implement planning policies, and then, for the City to evaluate development related proposals (annexations, land divisions, rezonings, special uses, planned developments, and public investment and service decisions) based on their consistency with this Plan. Reconciliation of decisions to plan recommendations will help establish both their legal defensibility and their economic efficiency.

Finally, to be effective, this Plan should continue to be evaluated by community representatives and amended as needed to keep current with changes brought about by time. At a minimum a five-year evaluation cycle is recommended; however, the City may wish to evaluate the Plan recommendations and community decision-making on an annual basis.

This document is organized into four sections based on principal planning issues:

- *Part I: Background Information*, gives an overview of important political, natural, socio-economic, existing development, and local planning factors.
- *Part II: Planning Policy Framework*, outlines the policy desires of the community and provides the basis for the plan recommendations that follow.
- *Part III: Plan Recommendations*, describes detailed recommendations for community character, land use, transportation, recreation, community facilities, and utilities.
- *Part IV: Implementation*, provides recommended actions that should be taken to ensure that the plan is realized.

2. Regional Context

The City of Sterling is located in northwestern Illinois, nearly equidistant between the Quad Cities and Rockford. While not the county seat, it is the largest community in Whiteside County and is located among other similar communities, such as Dixon and Rock Falls along the Rock River. The City is approximately 100 miles west of Chicago and 25 miles east of the Mississippi River. See Figure 1: Regional Context.

3. Planning Area

The General Planning Area for this Plan has been selected to include all lands in which the City has both a short-term and long-term interest in planning and development activity. The General Planning Area includes the following areas:

- All lands currently within the City's corporate limits.
- Lands within 5 miles of the City, but generally excluding Rock Falls and its 1½ mile extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ).
- More specifically, the City has been divided into five Strategic Planning Areas to allow for a more detailed inspection of the community (see Map 5: Neighborhood Planning Areas.)

This Strategic Comprehensive Plan covers a planning period running through the year 2025 (though there are a number of Plan recommendations that are intend to be attained in a much shorter timeframe). Within that period, much of the land within the City's General Planning Area will remain outside the municipal limits (i.e., the land will not be annexed). Still, the City has an interest in assuring that development activity within the entire General Planning Area does not negatively affect the capacity for logical urban growth within and beyond the planning period.

4. Relationship of this Plan to Other Jurisdictions

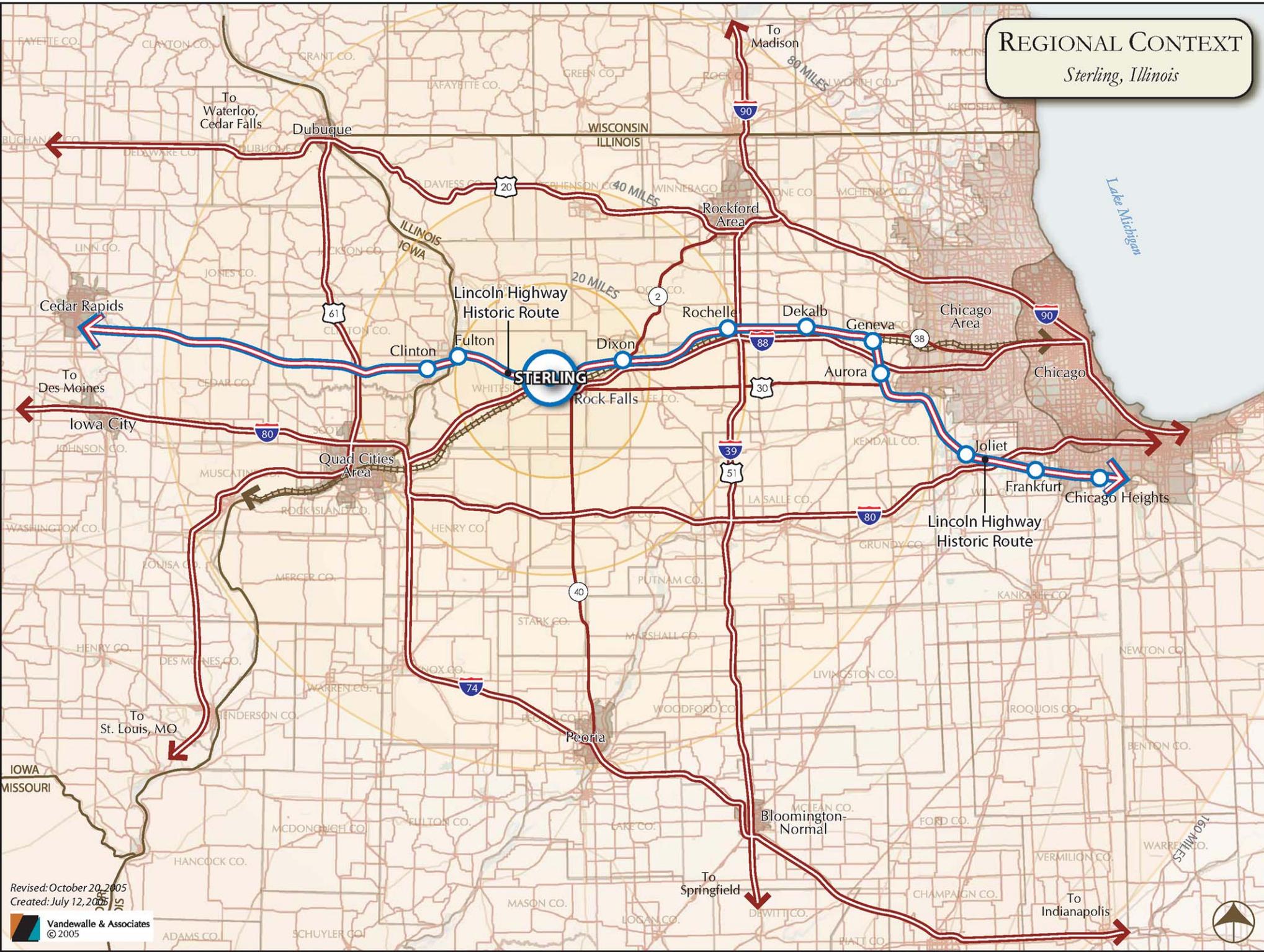
This Strategic Comprehensive Plan is for the City of Sterling. As an incorporated jurisdiction anticipating population growth, this Plan must accommodate and facilitate planned municipal expansion over a 20-year period. However, this Plan is also to function as a true strategic plan; clarifying City's objectives, being aware of the City's resources, and being responsive to a dynamic environment to provide clear, concise direction to policy-makers and the community over a 3- to 5-year timeframe.

The Plan attempts to coordinate recommendations with those of adjacent and overlapping jurisdictions. These include: the State of Illinois; Whiteside and Lee Counties; City of Rock Falls; Sterling, Hopkins, and Coloma Townships; other jurisdictions such as the area school and utility districts, and other governmental entities.

As a result of growth and territorial overlaps, policy approaches between these jurisdictions may differ. The City's interest is defined by the policy framework presented by the Plan's goals, objectives, and policies, described in this document. Where the potential for conflict exists between jurisdictions, a preferred approach is to seek meaningful and on-going intergovernmental planning through intergovernmental cooperation and joint agreements. A supporting or alternative approach is to minimize conflict by limiting planning and development actions to mutually acceptable "spheres of influence."

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Sterling, Illinois



Revised: October 20, 2005
Created: July 12, 2005

B. Natural Features

The natural features of the Planning Area provide a basic framework for analysis and suggest possible location advantages for particular land uses, and suggest the relationship between the City and the surrounding region. The natural resource base, especially environmentally sensitive areas with respect to soils, environmental corridors, wetlands, and floodplains are critical factors in local planning decision-making. Preservation and enhancement of sensitive natural features is important for both the visual attractiveness of the community and the prevention of severe developmental or environmental problems that may be difficult and costly to correct in the future. Natural features within and around Sterling are illustrated on Map 1: Natural Features.



1. Landforms/Topography/Geology

The landscape of Whiteside County and the City of Sterling is generally characterized by four major landforms: uplands, outwash plains, stream terraces, and flood plains. These landforms are the products of continental glaciation and more recent stream erosion. The deposition of till and postglacial stream erosion have modified the original bedrock topography to create the present rolling terrain. The outwash plain consists of materials deposited by melt-water from the receding glacier. The flood plains and stream terraces are the result of the ongoing process of stream erosion. Stream courses have changed in the geologic past, resulting in several abandoned channels in the survey area.



2. Hydrology

a. Rivers and Lakes

The Rock River is the predominant feature in and around the City. The river runs along the entire southern edge of the community. The river was initially desired to function as a transportation facility; however, its depth did not afford it this opportunity. The river's primary use is recreation, though it does assist in supplying some hydroelectric power for the region.

The Hennepin Feeder Canal is a man-made channel that connects the Rock River to the main channel of the Hennepin Canal. The Canal connects to the Illinois River and ultimately with the Mississippi River. This canal shortens the distance for river travel by nearly 500 miles. Construction began in 1890 and was completed in 1907, extending over 155 miles. The

expansion and reduced cost of railway transport soon made barge traffic obsolete. The canal is also listed on National Historic Register.

Sinnissippi Lake is actually the widening of the Rock River and was created by its damming. The dam, constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers, affords water enthusiasts the opportunity for boating, fishing, sailing, and water skiing. Oppold Marina, located adjacent to the lake, provides bait, fuel, boat launching and boat rental.

b. Floodplains

Flood hazard areas are located along the Rock River, Sinnissippi Lake, and tributaries. These have been identified and mapped by the Federal Insurance Administration for risk management purposes. The 100-year flood area—where the flooding probability is greater than 1% in any given year—is generally restricted to no development. The National Flood Insurance Program maps produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) designate official floodplain boundaries.

c. Wetlands

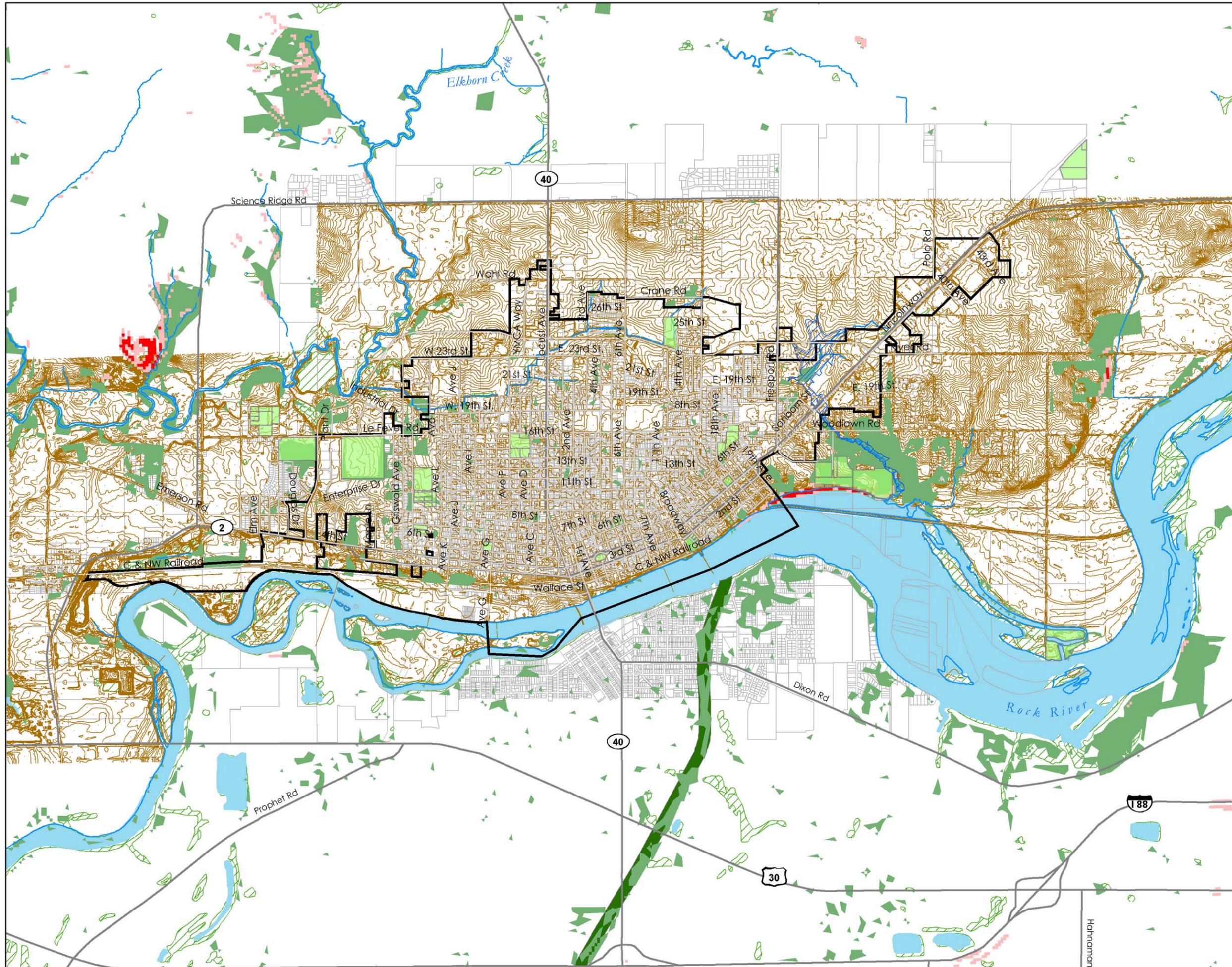
Wetland areas are located along streams and drainageways and in isolated low spots. These have been identified and mapped by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. These areas are important for aquifer recharge, groundwater and surface water quality improvement, and wildlife habitat. Significant wetland areas are located in areas near the Rock River channel. Generally, these areas are restricted to no development by Federal and State regulations.

d. Groundwater

According to the Whiteside County Soil Survey, the water supply in the area is good. The deep glacial outwash and underlying Cambrian aquifer of the Rock River Valley are the main sources of water for larger industries and municipalities. They are capable of supplying much more water than is currently used. The sandstone aquifers of Ordovician age supply water to smaller industries and cities. The shallow dolomitic limestone aquifers in the uplands supply water for domestic and livestock use. In areas of granular soils, these shallow aquifers are susceptible to contamination from both surface and subterranean sources. Deep aquifers in the planning area are generally of higher quality and considered substantially less susceptible to contamination.

3. General Soils Information

Soils in the Rock River Valley lowlands are deep, well drained, and nearly level to sloping soils that formed in loamy and sandy sediment underlain by sandy and gravelly sediment. Soils in the uplands to the south and southwest of the City are mostly deep, well drained, and gently sloping to strongly sloping soils that formed in glacial till or in thin loess and the underlying glacial drift. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service's *Soil Survey of Whiteside County, Illinois* contains more detailed information on soils in the planning area.



Natural Features

- Major Roads
- Corporate Limits
- Parcels
- Contours (10 ft)
- Streams
- Rivers & Lakes
- Slopes between 12%-20%
- Slopes greater than 20%
- Parks and Public Recreation
- Forested Lands
- Illinois State Parks
- Wetlands
- Floodplain



Date: February, 2006
Source: City of Sterling, IL, U.S. Census.



C. Social and Economic Factors

1. General Community Profile

The following pages contain a general community profile of the City of Sterling. Demographic data provides a snapshot of the composition of a community. Analyzing demographic data can effectively assist in formulating goals, recommendations, and implementation measures for comprehensive and strategic planning.

a. Population

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of the City of Sterling was 15,596 persons. The median age of residents of the City was 36.3 years in 2000. This was slightly less than that of the County, which was 38.5 years. The community had a non-white population of 15.6%, over double the proportion of Whiteside County that is non-white (7.2%). Estimates from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs put the City's 2004 population at 15,454.

Slightly over half of the City's population is female (52.4%), and two-thirds of the City's population is over the age of 25, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Additionally, nearly three-fourths of the City is over the age of 18, and nearly one-fifth is over the age of 62.

Comparatively, three-fourths of the County is also over the age of 18, but only about 15-percent is over the age of 62. The following table illustrates the composition of the City population by age.

Table 1: Age Statistics, 2000

Age Cohort	Number	Percentage
Under 5 years	1,116	7.2
5 to 9 years	1,114	7.2
10 to 14 years	1,032	6.7
15 to 19 years	1,058	6.8
20 to 24 years	1,021	6.6
25 to 34 years	2,120	13.7
35 to 44 years	2,316	15.0
45 to 54 years	1,862	12.1
55 to 59 years	654	4.2
60 to 64 years	541	3.5
65 to 74 years	1,180	7.6
75 to 84 years	1,011	6.5
85 years and over	426	2.8

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

The population of the City is generally a bit more mobile than the population of the County, State, or the U.S. According to the 1990 Census, 47% of Sterling residents lived in the same house as they did 5 years ago (compared to 56% for the County and State and 53% for the U.S.). About 17% moved from a different state (compared to 7% for the County, 6% for the State, and 9% for the U.S.). This most likely reflects Sterling's location near the Iowa and Wisconsin borders.

b. Housing

There were 6,596 households in the City in 2000 with an average size of 2.41 persons per household. This compares to 2.51 persons per household for Whiteside County as a whole. Household size has been decreasing throughout the region and country. This trend toward smaller household sizes is expected to continue into the future.

Also in 2000, almost 70% of housing units in the City were single-family, 9-percent were two-family, and the remainder were structures with three or more units per building. In the County, four-fifths of the housing units are single-family and 4-percent are two-family structures.

The median home value for the City in 2000 was \$70,700, which was lower than the median value for the County (\$75,700). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, over 90-percent of the housing units in the City were built before 1970 (compared to 85-percent in the County). Only about 10-percent of the City's housing stock was constructed after 1980. Again, this is a reflection of the changing economic dynamics the City has been experiencing during this timeframe and the concerns over both property and residence maintenance. However, the City has recently begun experiencing new housing development.

Monthly housing costs, as a percentage of household income, are a good indicator of the affordability of housing. For owner-occupied housing, less than 15-percent of households were paying more than 30% of their income for housing (similar to the County). For renter-occupied housing, nearly 40-percent of households were paying more than 30% of their income for housing (also similar to the County). This could imply that newer and younger residents are paying a disproportionate share of their income for housing, and experiencing very little in return (equity, tax deductions, etc.).

c. Labor Market & Income

The following table illustrates that over 60-percent of the City's population—nearly 12,000 persons—are in the labor pool. Unfortunately, over 6-percent of the labor pool is unemployed. Comparatively, Whiteside County has an unemployment rate *half* (3.3%) of the City's. This could be attributed to the changing economy of the region or the decline of Northwestern Wire and Steel Company (now known as Sterling Wire and Steel Company) in the years leading up to 2000.

Table 2: Employment Status

Employment Status	Number	Percent
Population 16 years and older	11,986	100.0
In labor force	7,609	63.5
Employed	7,105	93.4
Unemployed	504	6.6

Unsurprisingly, employment of Sterling residents is concentrated in manufacturing (almost one-third of the total). Also predictably, one-fifth of the labor pool is employed in educational, health, and social services.

Table 3: Occupation of Employed Residents

Industry	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	43	0.6
Construction	297	4.2
Manufacturing	2,193	30.9
Wholesale trade	124	1.7
Retail trade	869	12.2
Transportation, warehousing, and utilities	214	3
Information	135	1.9
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	296	4.2
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	372	5.2
Educational, health and social services	1,408	19.8
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	511	7.2
Other services (except public administration)	402	5.7
Public administration	241	3.4

The mean travel time to work is 15 minutes, and almost 80% of commuters in Sterling drive alone. This suggests that many residents work within the City or nearby Rock Falls. Comparatively, a similar proportion of workers countywide commute alone, but the mean travel time increases to nearly 19 minutes).

Table 4: Travel Time to Work

Travel Time	Percent
Less than 5 minutes	7.3
5 to 9 minutes	29.3
10 to 19 minutes	34.5
20 to 24 minutes	8.4
25 to 34 minutes	9.7
35 to 44 minutes	1.8
45 to 59 minutes	3.9
60 to 89 minutes	2.2
90 or more minutes	0.7

Median household income for the City in 2000 was \$40,354—higher than that of Whiteside County (\$36,664). Again, this can be attributed to Sterling historically being the manufacturing seat of the county. About 6-percent of the families in the City fell below the poverty level in 2000, compared to 7.5-percent for the County.

2. Population

This section details the population characteristics of Sterling. Unless noted otherwise, data is from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 Census of Population and Housing.

a. Historic Changes in Population

The Table below shows the population of Sterling since 1960. The City experienced an increase of 593 people between 1960 and 1980. In all likelihood this was due to the available of high-

paying employment opportunities in the City, most notably Northwestern Wire and Steel Company and Wahl Clipper Corporation. However, as the “rust belt” experienced a significant downturn in demand for U.S. steel and steel products, the population decreased by over 900 persons. Over the last fifteen years, the emergence of “new-economy” employment opportunities and the rediscovery of Sterling as an attractive community for families and retirees have resulted in a slight increase in the community’s population.

Table 5: Historic Sterling Population, 1960-2000

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Population	15,688	16,113	16,281	15,365	15,596
Number Change	-	+425	+168	-916	+231
Percent Change	-	+2.7%	+1.0%	-5.6%	+1.5%

Sources: U.S. Census and State of Illinois

b. Population Projections

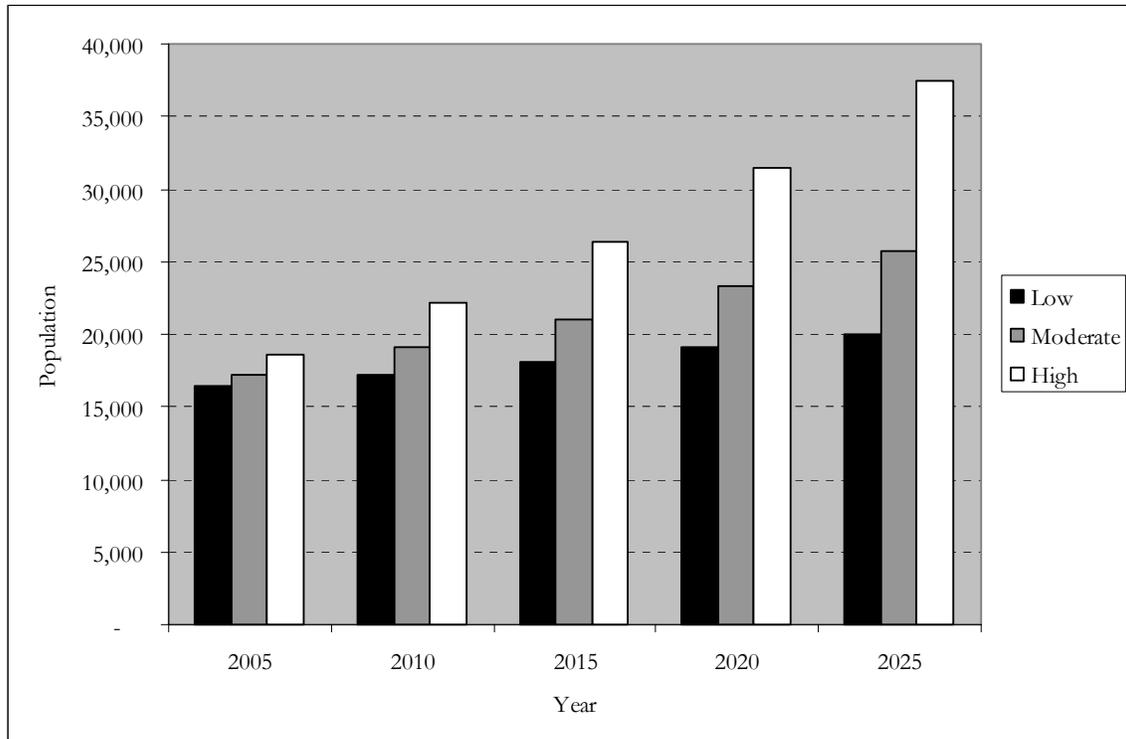
Population projections are important for helping communities estimate, and plan for, the future needs of residents. When considering population projections it is important to remember that it is difficult to accurately project populations for smaller, ex-urban areas, such as the City of Sterling. Therefore, any projections should be considered an educated guess of future growth based on past trends in the community. Unforeseen changes in the local or regional economy, decisions made by individual landowners and developers in the community, or significant changes in birth, death, or migration rates can dramatically alter population growth in the community.

Table 6 illustrates three different population projection scenarios for the City through the year 2025. The first column of projections (*Low*) assumes that the City will grow at a rate similar or slightly above the rate it has experienced for the past decade. The second projection column (*Moderate*) represents a growth scenario with a population increase twice the rate for the *Low* projection scenario. The third projection column (*High*) represents a growth scenario with a population increase two and one-half times the *Moderate* projection. A graphical representation of these three growth projections follows.

Table 6: Population Projections, 2005-2025

Growth Rate	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Low (1.0%)	16,396	17,236	18,120	19,049	20,025
Moderate (2.0%)	17,236	19,049	21,052	23,266	25,712
High (3.5%)	18,578	22,131	26,363	31,404	37,409

Using the mean growth over the past 40 years, or even the past 20 years, would be inappropriate due to the significant “ebbs and flows” experienced by the City as a result of its volatile manufacturing backbone. Again, as stated earlier, Sterling has begun to emerge as a haven for “new economy” jobs and as a retirement community. As such, it would be inappropriate to assume a negative population growth for the City. And while it is difficult to predict future population for an area the size of the City due to a host of variables; to be conservative, this Plan has been designed to accommodate the *Moderate* population projection.



3. Historic Resources

a. History of the City of Sterling

Sterling has a long and instrumental history of defining this region of Illinois. The following facts were made available in the “Getting to Know Us: Sterling-Rock Falls, Illinois” publication by the Sauk Valley Newspapers.

The Rock River, Elkhorn and Sugar Creeks, and a combination of woodlands and prairie made the Sterling area attractive to settlers in the early 1800s. The area was one of the last to be settled in Illinois, with the first settlers arriving in the region about 1832, after the Black Hawk War. Prior to their arrival, the territory was occupied by the Fox and Sauk Indian tribes.

In 1834, Hezekiah Brink was the first person to build a cabin in the area. Soon, he was joined by other settlers, and two years after Brink built his cabin, he and his wife had a daughter, who was the first child born in the township. In 1836, steamer pilot Captain D.S. Harris delivered a load of supplies to the settlers via the Rock River, with the majority of merchandise directed to Hezekiah Brink. In turn, Harris received a half-interest in a proposed community that was named Harrisburg in his honor. Around the same time, William Kirkpatrick laid claim to property located near Harrisburg that would come to be known as the settlement of Chatham.

Soon the residents of Harrisburg and Chatham became rivals as they competed for possession of rented office space and a post office called the Rock River Rapids. By 1838, though, the two settlements made their peace and merged in hopes of becoming the county seat. They united under the new name of Sterling, named after Major James Sterling, who participated in the Black Hawk War. However, the county seat was moved to Morrison, where it remains today.

One of the settlers’ other hopes was to utilize the Rock River as a navigational route. This plan, however, never worked out because the river had too many rapids. Instead, the settlers learned how to harness the river’s power to run saw and grist mills.

Because navigating the Rock River was not an option, the state authorized construction of a canal in 1839. It was to run along the south side of the river and bypass the shallow waters. Financial problems, though, caused this project to be abandoned as well. While Brink was somewhat successful in running a ferry service on the Rock River to attract travelers, other means for crossing the river were unsuccessful.

The first bridge was built in 1856-57, but was never completed and eventually washed away before it could be used. Other bridges were built and destroyed by the elements, including one toll bridge in 1863 and another in 1904 that was predicted to last forever, but it fell to ruins in 1906.

Industrial expansion increased dramatically after the Civil War. One of the first factories was the Mitten Factory owned by A.P. Smith, the founder of Rock Falls. The Keystone Co., Northwestern Wire and Steel and the Eureka Manufacturing Co. were all begun between 1870 and 1879. The arrival of the first train in Sterling in July 1855 caused great celebration and was a progressive step forward for the town.

Sterling didn't become a city until 1857, when it received a special charter from the General Assembly. An election of officers was held and Lorenzo Hapgood was chosen as the first mayor. In 1869, the charter was revised and Sterling was governed under amended provisions until it was incorporated under State law.

The Sterling Gas Co. was organized in 1873 to provide gas for domestic purposes and street illumination. Eventually the company changed its name and provided both gas and electricity after a period in which Sterling had many service companies.

In 1877, Sterling Business College was started by Harry Aument. He claimed to have the first business college in the world to include shorthand in its curriculum.

By July 1889, the installation of a system to light the City with electricity and the building of an electric railway progressed simultaneously. However, the project of electric transportation was complicated and was dormant for 10 years. One of the few electric lines to be successful was the Sterling, Dixon and Eastern Electric Railway (SD & EER). The SD & EER ran a trolley service between Sterling and Dixon from 1904 to 1925.

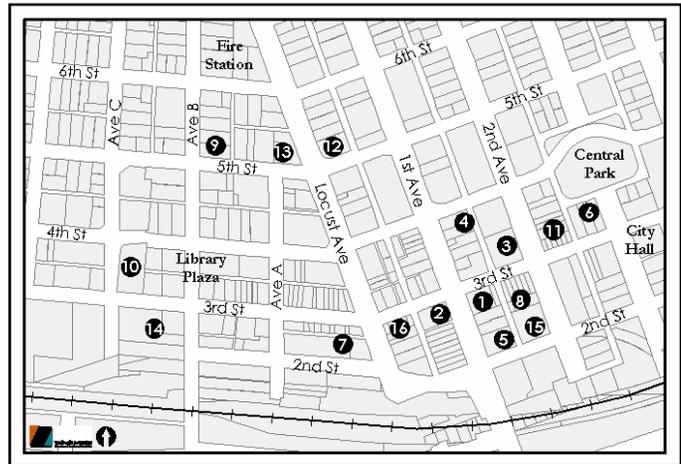
The Sterling Rock Falls Historical Society was founded in 1959 by individuals interested in preserving the historical heritage of both cities.



b. Sterling Historic Murals

Despite its extensive history and the significant number of historic properties and structures throughout the community, there is no “historic district” in the City. The City and its residents have, however, begun telling the tale of the Sterling’s history through a series of murals painted on various buildings in the downtown. The following is a listing of the murals, and the graphic at right illustrates their locations.

1. 3rd Street & Locust circa 1907
2. Sterling Dixon & Eastern Electric Railways
3. Sterling Hydraulic Co. from 1871
4. “Lightning” the dog outside Janssen & Goeken Dry Goods & Grocery
5. Sterling founder Hezekiah Brink
6. “Sterling Lady Zouaves” drill team
7. First Pioneer steam engine in Sterling, 1855
8. “Sterling Secret Six” IL State Troopers, 1930's
9. First City Hall & Fire Station
10. “Adelante” Hispanic Community
11. Ringling Brothers Circus Fire in Sterling, 1912
12. “Northwestern Fair” circa 1906
13. First Airplane Flyover, circa 1910
14. First Avenue Bridge, circa 1876-1924
15. “Major Sterling and the Coin Toss Naming City of Sterling”
16. “The President’s Corner” completed in 2005 – 2006.



D. Existing Built Environment

1. Existing Land Use

The existing land use pattern provides an important foundation for compatible future land development in the City. Map 2: Existing Land Use – City and Map 3: Existing Land Use – 5-mile Area illustrate the existing land uses within the planning area based upon a 2005 windshield survey conducted by the City’s planning consultants.

a. Land Use Map Categories

This Plan uses a detailed system of land use map categories that address both *use* and *community character* factors. Traditional land use classifications (such as agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial) are combined with modern community character classifications (such as “neighborhood,” “planned,” and “general”) to create a system of categories that provides for a

higher level of description and more detailed recommendations. These map categories are briefly described below:

1. **Agriculture and Woodland Preservation Areas:** agricultural uses, farmsteads, wooded lands, other open lands, and single-family residences at or below one dwelling per 35 acres;
2. **Single-Family Residential—Rural:** single-family residential development in rural subdivisions not served by public sewer and water, typically on lots between one and five acres in area;
3. **Single-Family Residential—Sewered:** single-family residential development served by municipal sanitary sewer typically at densities up to five dwelling units per acre;
4. **Two-Family Residential:** predominantly duplex development typically at densities up to eight dwelling units per acre;
5. **Mixed Residential:** mobile home, two-family, and multi-family residential development at densities greater than five dwelling units per acre;
6. **Neighborhood Business:** neighborhood-related commercial uses which preserve neighborhood residential character through building scale, building appearance, landscaping and signage;
7. **General Commercial:** indoor commercial, office, institutional, and controlled outdoor display land uses, with moderate landscaping and signage;
8. **Downtown:** pedestrian-orientated indoor commercial, office, institutional and residential uses with streetscaping and low-key signage typically associated with historic downtowns;
9. **Office:** high-quality office, institutional and office-support land uses with very generous landscaping and limited signage;
10. **General Industrial:** industrial land uses and including outdoor storage areas, with moderate landscaping and signage. May include extraction operations.;
11. **Government and Institutional:** large-scale public buildings and uses, hospitals, special-care facilities, and cemeteries. Small institutional uses (such as churches, hospices, etc.) may be located in other land use categories;
12. **Parks and Public Recreation:** open space facilities generally devoted to playgrounds, play fields, play courts and related recreation activities, whether public or private;
13. **Stormwater Management and Passive Recreation:** open space facilities generally devoted to managing stormwater run-off, to trails, picnic areas, natural areas, and related recreation activities;
14. **Surface Water:** lakes, ponds, rivers, and perennial streams;
15. **Vacant:** typically open or vacant lands, but not associated with lands utilized for agricultural or recreation purposes;
16. **Right-of-way:** publicly-owned land for transportation uses, including roads, highways, and railroads.

b. Existing Land Use Pattern

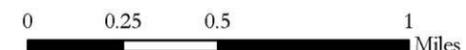
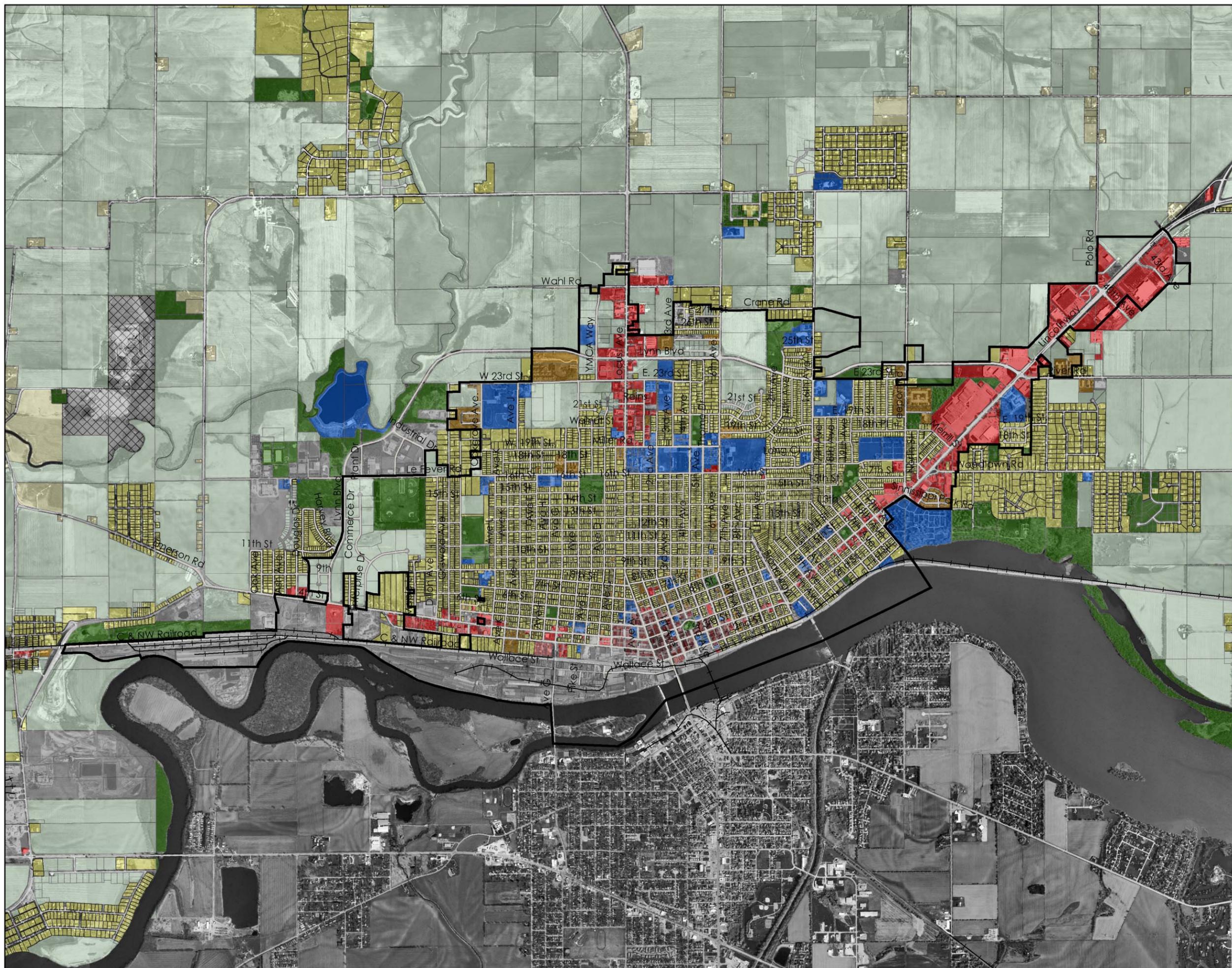
Residential Development

The majority of residential development in the City of Sterling is *Single-Family Residential*. Areas of single-family development are widespread, and range from the older neighborhoods surrounding the downtown to the newer developments along Lynn Blvd. *Two-Family Residential* development is scattered throughout the community, but is focused in and around the downtown area.

Limited *Mixed Residential* development (structures containing three units or more) is located within the City, typically focused along major transportation routes, such as along Lynn Blvd or Freeport Road.

Existing Land Use - City

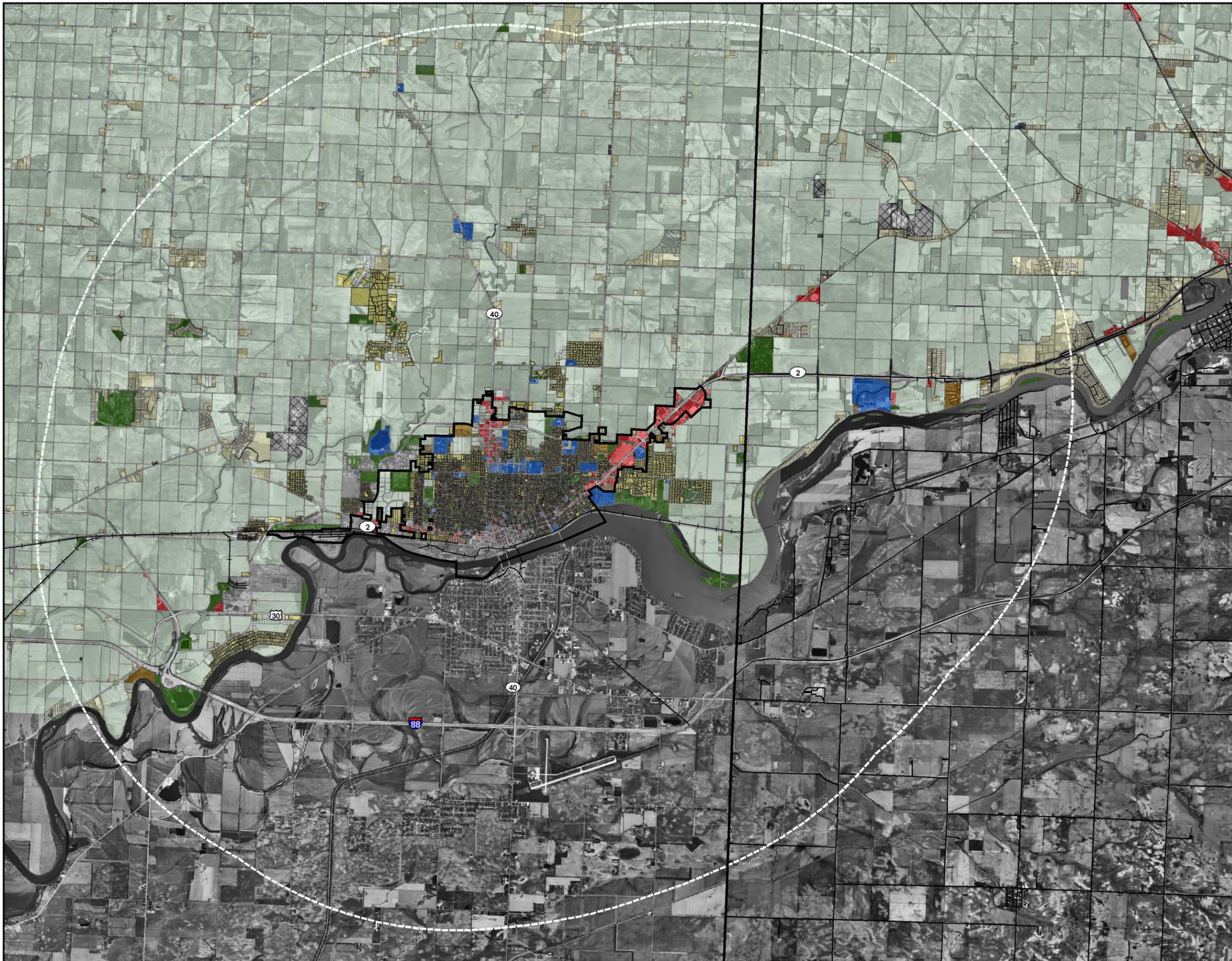
-  Corporate Limits
-  Parcels
-  Railroad
-  Agricultural and Woodland Preservation Areas
-  Single Family Residential - Rural
-  Single Family Residential - Sewered
-  Two-Family/Townhouse Residential
-  Mixed Residential
-  Neighborhood Business
-  General Commercial
-  Downtown
-  Office
-  General Industrial
-  Government and Institutional
-  Parks and Public Recreation
-  Stormwater Management and Passive Recreation
-  Surface Water
-  Vacant
-  Right-of-Way



Date: February, 2006
Source: City of Sterling, U.S. Census, ISGI 1998-1999.



Existing Land Use - 5-Mile Area



-  Corporate Limits
-  5-Mile Area
-  Parcels
-  Railroad
-  Agricultural and Woodland Preservation Areas
-  Single Family Residential - Rural
-  Single Family Residential - Sewered
-  Two-Family/Townhouse Residential
-  Mixed Residential
-  Neighborhood Business
-  General Commercial
-  Downtown
-  Office
-  General Industrial
-  Government and Institutional
-  Parks and Public Recreation
-  Stormwater Management and Passive Recreation
-  Surface Water
-  Vacant
-  Right-of-Way



Date: February, 2006
Source: City of Sterling, U.S. Census, ISGI 1998-1999.



Areas of *Rural Residential* development are located within the Planning Area outside of the current City limits. The location of such developments is widespread, and continues to be propagated by the Illinois Plat Act. Rural Residential development located along State Trunk Highway (STH) 2, Emerson Road, Freeport Road, Woodlawn Road, and Science Ridge Road can inhibit the ability for the city to grow in an organized and comprehensive manner.

Commercial/Office Development

The historic downtown core of the community is the primary location of retail, service, and office development in the City. However, over the past decades, commercial and office development has extended along the Lincoln Highway and at the north edge of the City along Locust Street.

Industrial Development

The City of Sterling has a rich and extensive industrial history. The steel and hardware industries, specifically, made Sterling the city that it is. Older industrial development within and adjacent to Sterling is focused along the Rock River, including National Hardware, Lawrence Hardware, Northwestern Wire and Steel Company, Wahl Clipper Corporation, and others.

Industrial development continues to be focused along the Rock and adjacent to downtown due to the presence of the Union Pacific rail line. However, there are large areas of new industrial development along LeFevre Road, the west end of Lynn Blvd, and along West Avenue.

The City has aggressively pursued the redevelopment of the riverfront, successfully obtaining State and Federal Brownfield Grant monies. Instrumental in the continued clean-up of the riverfront has been the significant cooperation of the current property owners.

Active and Passive Recreational Areas

The City of Sterling has been blessed by forward thinking individuals who have ensured that the area is afforded a number of active park sites. The parks are controlled/managed by either the City or the Sterling Park District. The parks have been illustrated on Map 1: Natural Resources and Map 4: Utility and Community Facilities as *Active Recreation* uses, and are detailed later in this Section.

There are larger natural areas on the north and west sides of the community along Elkhorn Creek, adjacent to Sinnissippi Park, and of course the lowland areas adjacent to the Rock River. *Passive Recreation* uses are also illustrated on Map 1: Natural Resources and Map 4: Utility and Community Facilities. There are a number of 18-hole golf courses located in the Sterling area: Emerald Hills, Lake View Golf Club and Country Club, and the Rock River Country Club.

Other Existing Development

Institutional uses in the City are concentrated in downtown, including the City Hall, Post Office, Library, and other community facilities. However, the public works and Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) are located in the northwest part of the community. The middle and high school are centrally located, though most of the schools, churches, and institutional living facilities are located in neighborhoods throughout the community.

A number of extraction sites are located just outside the City. One quarry is located west of the City south of Highway 2. Another quarry is located northwest of the City, north of Emerson Road.

2. Existing Transportation System

Access is a key determinant of growth because it facilitates the flow of goods and people into and around the community. The City of Sterling is connected to the region through different transportation modes, summarized below.

a. Roadways

Sterling is approximately 1½ miles north/northeast of Interstate 88. Access to Sterling from Interstate 88 is via the Illinois Highway 40 interchange south of the City and the IL Route 2/30 interchange southwest of the City. Approximately 87-centerline miles of paved streets are located within the City. This does not include nearly 13-centerline miles of State Routes for which the City provides routine maintenance.

Four state or federal highways run through or near the City, including:

- IL 40, which extends from north of the City, through the downtown, through Rock Falls to Interstate 88. According to the Illinois Department of Transportation, traffic volumes on IL 40 just south of downtown were approximately 25,900 cars per day in 2003. Peak hour traffic congestion is especially apparent at IL 40's intersection with IL Route 2 (Lincoln Highway).
- IL Route 2 (Lincoln Highway), which runs east-west through the center of the City. From the City's east end, access is generally limited to IL Route 2, with four lane divided facility. Within the central part of the City, access is generally unrestricted. Traffic volumes on IL Route 2 just east of the Lynn Blvd intersection are 20,600 cars per day. Traffic volumes on IL Route 2 at the west end of the City drop to less than 8,000 cars per day.
- US 30, which generally runs east-west through Rock Falls, but also, includes the west end of Sterling. Traffic volumes on United States Highway (USH) 30 at the west end of the City are only about 5,000 cars per day at the intersection with I-88. However, it is anticipated that traffic volumes will increase over the next decade with the increase in industrial development occurring in this area.
- I-88, which runs east-west from downtown Chicago to Davenport, Iowa. This is a limited access roadway that is part of the federal interstate system. Traffic volumes along I-88 are approximately 12,000 cars per day between IL 40 and STH 30.

The above highways run in a general east-west direction through the area. While IL 40 appears to carry most of the north-south traffic, this is because there are only two primary bridge crossings over the Rock River connecting Sterling to Rock Falls and I-88.

The local road network carries the bulk of north-south traffic through the City. It has been a priority of the administration to ensure the continual upgrade of local roads. This includes Locust Street, 6th Avenue, and Freeport Road, which function as major collector roads. These are mainly two-lane roads with an urban cross-section (i.e., curb and gutter), except at the edges of the City. Additionally, 16th Avenue functions as a collector street within the City, though it has not been constructed as one. Particularly Freeport Road and 6th Avenue experience traffic congestion during peak hours. These roads experience 5,900 and 3,300 cars per day respectively. Expansion considerations of these roadways to four travel lanes will not be necessary until volumes reach 10,000 vehicles per day.

Other east-west collector streets within and near the City include LeFevre Road, Science Ridge Road, and Lynn Blvd. The recent completion of Lynn Blvd will result in the roadway becoming a major transportation backbone and bypass around the community.

b. Airports

The nearest public use airports are the Whiteside County Airport-Joseph H. Bittorf Field, located south of the City of Rock Falls, the Greater Rockford Airport (RFD), located south of the City of Rockford, and the Moline-Quad City International Airport, located in Moline. Each of these airports is roughly 1 hour from the City. Larger air carrier and passenger facilities are located at Chicago O'Hare Airport, Chicago Midway, and Peoria, each located about 2 ½ hours from Sterling.

The Whiteside County Airport contains a 6,500-foot long, 150-foot wide primary asphalt runway. The airport is located near the Rock Falls Business Park and is easily accessible to Sterling businesses and industries. The airport can accommodate large jet traffic. In fact, Air Force One has landed at the facility.

The Greater Rockford Airport is home to the second largest air hub sorting facility in United Parcel Service's system, as well as Airborne Express and BAX Global facilities. RFD is a United States Customs Port of Entry, home to thirty industrial tenants and the Authority is grantee for Foreign Trade Zone 176. The diverse activities at RFD cause it to have a greater economic impact on the region it serves than any other commercial service airport in the State of Illinois, excluding the city of Chicago's system of airports.

The Quad City International Airport (QCIA) serves travelers from throughout Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois. There are currently five airlines serving eight nonstop hubs, or connecting cities. QCIA Airport Services provides fueling services for signatory and non-signatory carriers at the QCIA.

c. Rail Service

Sterling's historic development was tied, in part, to the railroad. This still holds true today. The active rail line is operated by the Union Pacific Rail Company. Main line tracks from the east-west transcontinental main line cross Illinois and terminate at Proviso Yard in the Chicago suburb of Northlake. Union Pacific's newest major inter-modal facility, Global III, opened nearby in Rochelle in 2003. The rail line experiences nearly 200 freight-laden trains per day.

The major commodities in Illinois transported by Union Pacific (UP) include corn, soybeans, automobile parts, finished automobiles, general merchandise, and coal. UP's top customers in Illinois include American President Companies, United Parcel Service, and Commonwealth Edison. Other large customers include K-Line and Chrysler.

Sterling is not directly served by passenger rail service, and due to the significant amount of freight trains traversing the community, it is unlikely that there will be passenger service any time soon. However, passenger rail service via Amtrak is available in Princeton and Mendota, approximately 30 miles south of Sterling. Also, the Chicago Metra Commuter Rail System has a stop in Aurora, in Kane County and is currently considering expansion to service the DeKalb area.

d. Public Transportation

Sterling is currently not served by public or quasi-public transit. Quasi-public includes shared ride taxi service, particularly for the elderly, which has proven beneficial in similar communities.

e. Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are important for cities the size of Sterling, where uses are often within walking distance of one another and schools and churches are such an important part of the community. Bike and pedestrian facilities are also important for commuting and recreational use. The Westwood/Sinnissippi Park Pedestrian Bike Trail connects portions of the community, and is continually being expanded.

Many portions, especially central areas, of the City are generally served by sidewalks, although gaps in the network exist and maintenance is an issue in certain locations. For the most part, newer areas of the City have not been provided with sidewalks. This greatly limits access for all transportation but cars.

However, newer transportation facilities—such as Lynn Blvd—have been provided with recreational trails. In addition, a pedestrian connection is being provided along the Upper Dam to connect Sterling and Rock Falls. The City of Sterling should continue to “fill gaps” in the system to ensure that alternative transportation remains a viable option, especially for the youth and elderly in the community.

3. Existing Utility Systems

Public sanitary sewer and water services are available throughout the City. The Sterling Sanitary Sewer District provides interceptor sanitary sewer service to the City and some areas surrounding the City. The Rock River Reclamation District provides sewer service to portions of the eastern parts of the City. Installation and maintenance of smaller lines (less than eight inch diameter) are the responsibility of the City government. The wastewater treatment plant with some upgrades has sufficient treatment capacity to meet demands over the planning period.

Public water service is provided to different parts of Sterling by three separate water utility districts. The Illinois American Water Company provides service to all parts of the City.

4. Existing Park & Recreation System

Park and recreation opportunities are provided both by the City of Sterling and the Sterling Park District. The Sterling Park District is responsible for providing and maintaining mainly larger park facilities, as well as offering a variety of recreational opportunities. *Sports Illustrated* magazine rated the City of Sterling and the Sterling Park District as a “2005 Good Sports Community of the Year.”

Existing City-owned park facilities are smaller neighborhood parks. These parks include:

Table 7: Existing Parks

Park	Location	Amenities
14 th Ave Park	14 th Ave. & 2 nd St.	Playground
Central Park	Brinks Circle	Picnic Facilities, Concerts
Dale Park	Locust St. & 2 nd St.	Open Play Area
Flock Park	Locust St. & 8 th St.	Open Play Area
Lincoln Park	16 th Ave. & 4 th St.	Basketball/Playground
Platt Park	20 th Ave. & 7 th St.	Baseball Diamond, Tennis, Playground
Wallace Park	Ave. G & 5 th St.	Basketball/Playground

The Sterling Park District operates the following park facilities:

Table 8: Park District Parks

Park	Location	Amenities
Douglas Park	Chestnut Ave./Lynn Ave.	2 acres, Basketball, Playground
Eberley Park	Douglas Dr./LeFevre Rd.	25 acres, Jogging/Walking Trail
Gartner Park	LeFevre Rd.	Baseball Diamond, Playground
Harry Kidd Field	1219 7 th St	Football Field
Hoover Park	3307 Woodlawn Rd.	SMART Trail, Picnic Facilities, Playground
Kilgour Park	400 W. LeFever Rd.	12 acres, Basketball, Picnic Facilities, Playground, Restrooms, Tennis Courts, Walking/Jogging Path
Lawrence Park	Avenue G Island	First Sterling Park, Boat Launch, Swimming Pool, Picnic/Grill Facilities, Horseshoe, Playground, Restrooms, Shelters
Oppold Marina	Stouffer Rd.	31 acres, Boat Launch, Fishing, Ice Skating Pond, Picnic Facilities, Playground, Restroom, Shelters
Propheter Park	506 E. 6th St.	Basketball, Playground
Sanborn Park	Sanborn St.	Open Play Area
Scheid Park	Woodburn Ave./11th St.	14 acres, Basketball, Playground, Restroom, Shelters, Soccer Fields
Sinnissippi Park	Sinnissippi Rd.	Ball Diamond (Unlighted), Cross-Country Skiing, Fishing, Disc Golf (PDGA), Historical National Site, Picnic/Grills Facilities, Playground Equipment, Open Play Areas, Restrooms, Shelters, Sledding, Hopewillian Indian Mounds, Pedestrian & Bike Trails
Thomas Park	2301 12th Ave.	12 acres, Basketball, Ice Skating, Playground, Tennis Courts

The Park District also operates the Dillon Home Museum, the Duis Recreational Center, Emerald Hill Golf Course and Recreation Center, the Fraser Center, and the Westwood Sports and Expo Center.

The Westwood Sports Complex is a premiere recreational facility providing courts and fields for a variety of activities. These include ball diamonds, basketball courts, batting cages, cardiovascular equipment, cross-country skiing, racquetball courts, tennis courts, volleyball courts, and the only 1/8-mile running track in northern Illinois. The Center also hosts a number of nationally acclaimed tournaments and events.



The Sterling-Rock Falls Family YMCA recently completed a multi-million dollar facility to serve residents and visitors of the area.

Other recreational facilities and services are provided by or in association with schools in Sterling. These include athletic fields located adjacent to the high school and other playground and recreational space provided at the grade and middle schools. Additionally, Centennial Auditorium is a state-of-the-art, multi-million dollar facility that is utilized for school district, community, and professional performances. The Sterling Public Library also provides children's programming.

5. Existing Community Facilities and Community Services

a. Administration and Public Safety

Sterling's City Hall is located in the Coliseum Building on 3rd Avenue within Downtown Sterling. The Coliseum includes administrative offices, meeting space, the City Council Chambers, and an auditorium.

The City provides police services within its corporate limits from the Coliseum building, as well.

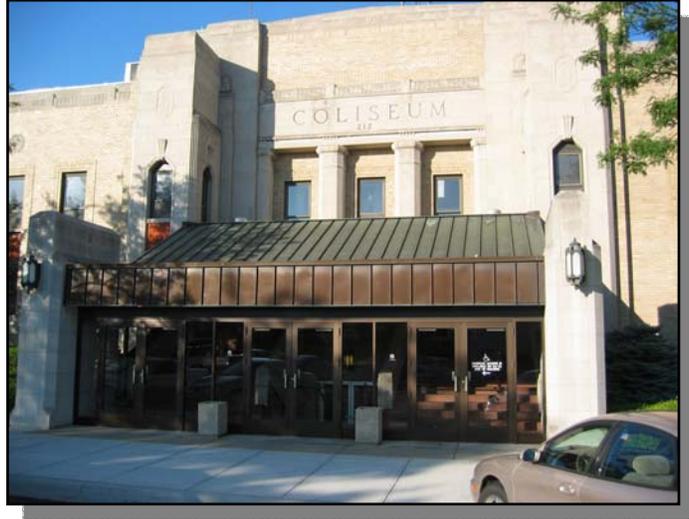
According to the 2003 Year End Report, the Police Department consists of 34 sworn-officers and administrative personnel. The Department also has a K-9 unit and a number of non-sworn personnel.

The Department is tasked with serving and protecting the City of Sterling, ensuring its personnel are appropriately trained, engaging in public education and outreach programs, and assisting other area law enforcement agencies.

The City of Sterling and Sterling Rural Fire Protection District provides fire and emergency medical services for an area of about 87 square miles serving approximately 25,000 persons, including the City and surrounding unincorporated lands. Operating out of two stations in Sterling, the Fire Department utilizes 24 firefighters and a fleet of 11 vehicles to provide firefighting services, EMS, search and rescue operations and extrication. The Department has an automatic aid agreement with the neighboring Rock Falls Fire Department.

b. The Coliseum

Architect Elmer Behrns of Chicago was hired to design the Coliseum. After much debate as to where to locate the Coliseum, including the possibility of Rock Falls consolidating into Sterling and locating the building south of the Rock River, the Coliseum Board finally settled on the location of the old Hearse Factory on 3rd Street. Construction of the Coliseum began in the fall of 1930, and was finished May 1, 1931, at a total cost of nearly \$200,000. On May 8, 1931, the official dedication ceremony kicked off. The Coliseum Board presented the new hall to Mayor H.E. Burkholder during ceremonies at the evening's formal banquet. Nearly 5,000 people attended dedication ceremonies over the weekend. Over the life of the facility, the Coliseum has hosted the National Guard Armory, high school basketball games, pro wrestling and boxing, a bowling alley, roof dances, concerts, theater, professional exhibits and recruiting. The building is now home to city hall and the police department.



c. City Library

The Sterling Public Library is located in downtown at Library Plaza. While the Sterling Public Library was established in 1878, the present building was completed in 1905 as a Carnegie Free Library. Expansions were completed in 1985 and in 1995.

The library maintains a collection of over 67,000 volumes, subscribes to more than 160 periodicals, and has 10 computers available for public use. Additionally, the library maintains an online catalog and an interlibrary loan program both regionally and locally in cooperation with the local high schools.

The library hosts numerous programs for children and adults including children's reading and incentive programs, guest speakers, literature readings and performances, and book discussions.

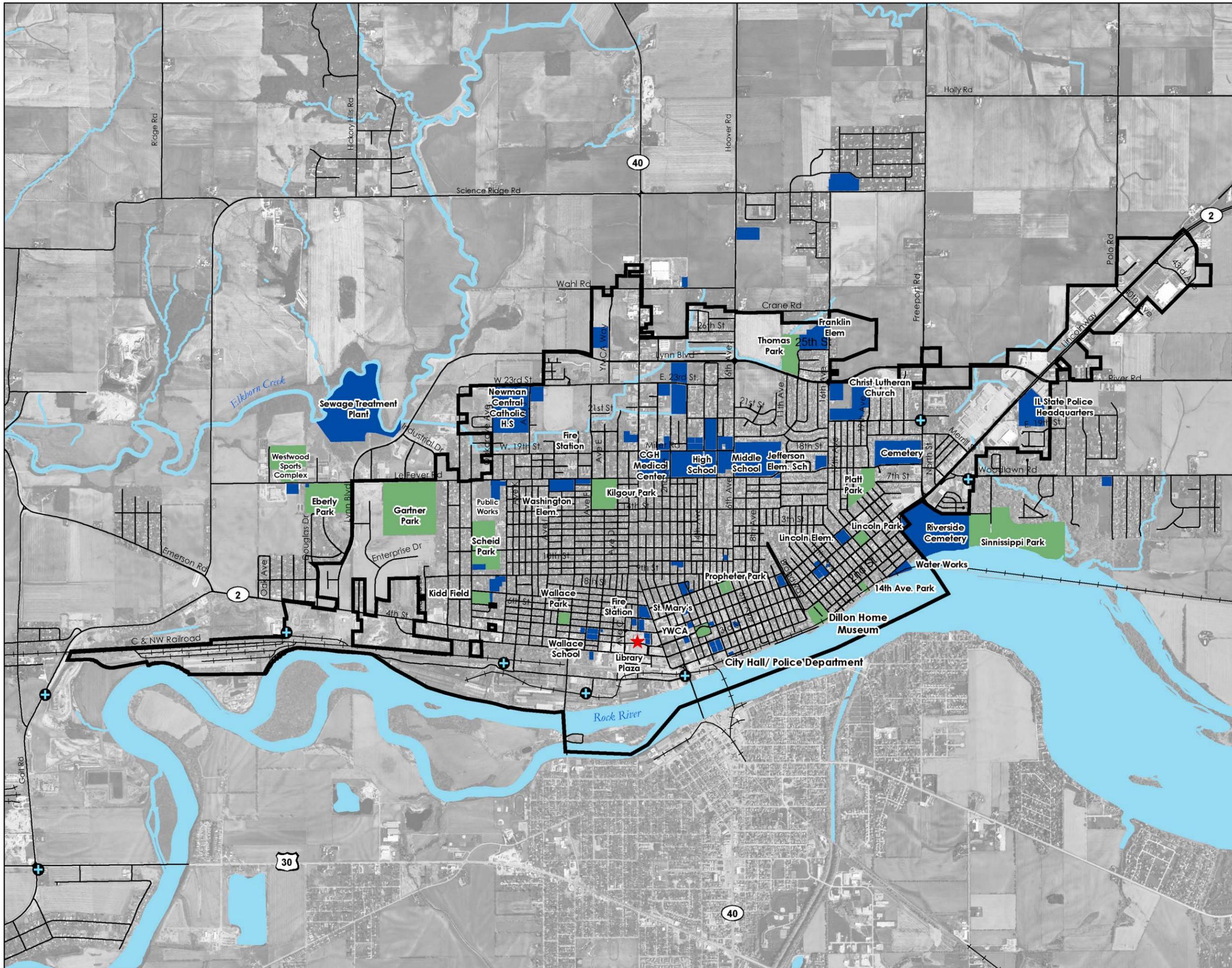
Additionally, the library contains an extensive collection of local history and genealogy. A part-time genealogist is on staff.

Utilities and Community Facilities

-  Roads
-  Railroad
-  Corporate Limits
-  Streams
-  Rivers & Lakes

Sterling Landmarks

-  Institutional
-  Parks and Open Space
-  Lift Stations



Date: August, 2006
Source: City of Sterling, IL, U.S. Census, Strand.



d. Health Services

The City of Sterling has become the hub of medical care for the area as well. Community General Hospital Medical Center is a comprehensive hospital, providing 24 hour trauma care, diagnostic imaging, labs, pharmacy, as well as a staff of over 100 physicians in more than 25 departments ranging from Anesthesiology to Vascular Surgery. The hospital also maintains co-ownership in the Northern Illinois Cancer Treatment Center which serves patients living within a 60 mile radius. CGH commenced with a significant facility expansion in 2006 that included additional patient rooms, EMS garages, and relocation of the helipad.



The Sterling-Rock Falls Clinic is also a large part of the medical community. The physician-owned group comprises approximately 50 doctors in several locations in the area, including the main office in Sterling. Together, they provide over 20 specialty areas and many additional services ranging from speech therapy to full optical services.

e. Education

Public Schools

The Community Unit School District #5 operates four elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school that provide numerous programs that tailor to various needs. The service area includes the City of Sterling and parts of the Towns of Sterling, Genesee, Jordan, Palmyra, and Hopkins. Sterling students of the Community Unit School District #5 have the benefit of both excellent educational opportunities and terrific facilities.



Table 9: Sterling Community Unit District #5

Facility Name	Enrollment	Grades
Sterling High School	1,084	9-12
Challand Middle School	775	6-8
Franklin Elementary School	440	K,1-2
Jefferson Elementary School	435	P-2
Lincoln Elementary School	318	3-5
Washington Elementary School	405	3-5
TOTAL	3,457	P-12

Sterling High School is a beautiful facility that is more reminiscent of a private preparatory school or small university campus than a public school. The facility is well located near the center of the city and anchors the adjacent neighborhoods.

Challand is the lone public middle school to serve the district, with grades 6 – 8. The four elementary schools divide children into grades P -2 and grades 3 - 5.

Parochial Schools

The City of Sterling is also home to several parochial schools. St. Mary's Catholic School offers grades K-5 and Community Catholic Middle School offers 6th through 8th grades. Christ Lutheran provides K-8. Newman Central Catholic High School provides the Sterling, Rock Falls, and Dixon areas the choice of a catholic high school. Sterling Christian is located just outside of the City, in Galt, providing grades K-8.

Table 10: Parochial School Information

Facility Name	Enrollment	Grades
Newman Central Catholic High School	233	9-12
St Mary's and Community Catholic Middle School	335	P-8
Christ Lutheran School	130	P-8
Sterling Christian	111	P-12
TOTAL	809	P-12

Colleges and Universities

Located next to the Sterling High School is the Whiteside Area Career Center (WACC). The Career Center is one of sixty-one regional vocational systems in Illinois. The center specializes in market and technology career preparation. Areas of study include agriculture, health occupations, industrial trades, and consumer science.

Sauk Valley Community College is the regional two year college for the area. The college is located along Highway 2, midway between Sterling and Dixon, and enrolls approximately 3,000 students. Sauk Valley offers numerous two year specialty degrees, general degrees for students transferring to 4-year universities and several technical programs and workshops.

f. Wastewater Utility

Three divisions make up the Wastewater Utility. Utility Billing, which is operated under the Finance Division, Wastewater Maintenance and Wastewater Treatment (WWTP), are operated under the Community Services Department.

The Wastewater Maintenance division maintains all the City's sewer lines and oversees the replacement of older or broken sewer lines. Keeping the lines and basins clean helps prevent sewer backups, and helps the Wastewater Treatment Plant to work more efficiently.

The City of Sterling's WWTP processes the wastewater disposal of 15,000 residents, 1,500 non-residents, more than 300 commercial establishments and approximately 50 industrial customers. Each day, the plant treats 3.6 million gallons of wastewater per day.

The WWTP is located on a 50-acre site that includes a 32-acre aerated lagoon. Five lift stations and over 80 miles of sanitary sewer lines that have the capacity to flow up to nine million gallons per day to the plant. The treatment plant has been named the top Class III WWTP in Illinois twice, and has been nominated seven times for the honor in the past 20 years. A crew of five full-time employees operates the WWTP.

g. Public Works Division

The Public Works Division is comprised of Street maintenance, Sewer Maintenance, Traffic Controls, Parks and Public Spaces, and the City Shop. The City garages and field office are located at 1605 Avenue L. The Division is responsible for the repair, replacement, and general maintenance of 87-centerline miles of City roadways, and nearly 13-centerline miles of State Routes. It has been a priority of the administration to ensure the continual upgrade of local roads.

The City of Sterling has established a sidewalk and curb replacement program to encourage residents to make repairs to deteriorated sidewalks and curbs adjacent to their property on a 50/50 cost sharing basis.

h. Other Utilities

- **Cable.** Insight Communications is the cable television provider.
- **Broadband.** Essex Computers provides broadband DSL service within a 3.5 mile radius from downtown.
- **Electric.** Sterling's electric provider is Commonwealth Edison.
- **Natural Gas.** NICOR provides natural gas service to the area.
- **Solid Waste.** In 1990, the City of Sterling became **one of the first five cities in Illinois to offer volume based solid waste collection.** That is, the greater volume of waste one disposes of, the greater the cost. At the same time, the City added recycling and yard waste collection services. The City currently contracts with Allied Solid Waste Company to collect waste from nearly 5,200 residential properties in the City. Residential collection consists of refuse, bulk waste, recycling and yard waste, and white goods collections. Commercial and industrial collection is handled through private contracts.
- **Telephone.** SBC is the local phone service provider for the region.
- **Water.** Water is provided by Illinois-American Water Company. Founded in 1886 as the American Water Works & Guarantee Company, it was reorganized as American Water Works Company, Inc. in 1947. On January 10, 2003, the company was acquired by RWE Group, renamed "American Water," and became a part of the RWE Group's water division.

E. Existing Planning Framework

This section briefly describes existing plans, studies, and ordinances in and for the City and surrounding areas that help guide development. These existing documents provided background information for the development of this Comprehensive Plan.

1. City of Sterling, Illinois Comprehensive Plan (1996)

The City's most recent Comprehensive Plan was adopted in December 1996, and this planning process is intended to replace the 1996 document. While the 1996 Plan has neared the end of its expected life-cycle, it has served as a policy document for the City. The City has previously participated in the following planning processes:

- Plans for Rock Falls and Sterling, Illinois (1954)
- A Comprehensive Plan for Sterling, Illinois (1969)
- Interim Planning Report (1971)

2. City Municipal Code (Last Update 1994)

This document provides regulations for all aspects of land use, licensing, operations, etc. within the City of Sterling. The Municipal Code contains the City's zoning code which serves as the primary mechanism for regulating land use and development in the City, and ultimately for implementing the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, the Municipal Code contains the Subdivision Ordinance which governs the division of land within the City and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. The 1994 Code update was based upon the 1982 Code. The City continues to approve minor amendments to the Code to address policy and other changes in the community.

3. City Budget (2005 – 2006)

The Fiscal Year Budget is prepared annually to illustrate projected revenues and expenditures for the community. The annual budget is one step in delineating the mill rate for the community.

4. Sterling Police Department Year End Reports (2001 – 2004)

The Sterling Police Department Year End Reports are produced annually by the Chief of Police. These documents outline department priorities, department assignments, year end statistics, and reports relating to investigations, accidents, juvenile issues, revenues, training, and partnerships. The documents provide a concise understanding of department service obligations and expenditures.

5. Illinois Lincoln Highway Interpretive Master Plan (2004)

The Interpretive Master Plan was completed by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and was provided to the Illinois Lincoln Highway Coalition, in July 2004. The document outlines the history of the highway, outlines themes and messages of the highway, demarcates interpretive resources along the highway in Illinois, and provides recommendations to enhance tourist experience and interpretive media.

The Interpretive Master Plan singles out the Dillon Home (discussed in the Historical Section of this document), a monument dedicated in 1903 outlining the place where Abraham Lincoln spoke on July 18, 1856, and a "Lincoln in Sterling" historic marker on the site where Lincoln once spent the night. The Interpretive Master Plan recommends that a kiosk be located outside of the iron fence at the Dillon Home.

6. Whiteside County Greenway and Trails Plan (1999)

The Greenway and Trails Plan was completed by a Coalition of local and county-wide agency representatives with select state agency involvement. The primary goals of the Plan are to increase/enhance greenway and recreational trail connections throughout Whiteside County.

The Plan recommends the following facilities for the City of Sterling:

- Construction of a riverfront trail from the Upper Dam to Oppold Marina.
- A trail along Lynn Boulevard from the Lincoln Highway to Locust Street.
- A trail along Lynn Boulevard from Locust Street to Westwood.
- The installation of signage calling attention to the shared use of streets by motorized vehicles and bicycles.

7. Lower Rock River Ecosystem Partnership (2005)

This Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan promotes recreational and economic development that is compatible with the preservation of the natural features, identifies and promotes the strategies for ecological protection, and furthers the goals of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Conservation 2000 and Ecosystem Programs.

II. PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

A. Planning Process

This Plan was developed through an 8-month planning process. The Plan Commission led the development of the Comprehensive Strategic Plan and coordinated the planning process with the planning consultant. The City Council provided additional oversight, and City Staff provided essential day-to-day guidance and input.

The planning process included a public participation element to ensure that the plan was based on the community's vision for the future. A vision workshop and mapping exercise were conducted to gather public opinion on a variety of issues related to the future of the community. Focus group sessions were held with local business interests, developers/builders, community organizations, and residents to obtain the unique perspective of different groups. A working session was held with the City Council to gain their input and direction for policies and goals related to the plan. Based on this input, a Draft Plan Document including maps was produced for review by the Plan Commission, City Council, City Staff, and the public. Revisions to the Draft Plan were made based on their review and comment. Finally, a public hearing was held at the City Council before final plan adoption.

B. Public Participation

The development of this plan included a public participation process. A summary of the results is included below:

1. Vision Workshop

The Strategic Plan is an action-oriented plan. It is intended to outline a detailed implementation strategy for the community and specific planning areas to assist community residents, developers, and city officials in decision-making and to identify priorities for policies, programs and activities. To gather a citizen perception of the City of Sterling and its growth, an open invitation was made to all those interested in the future direction of the City. The workshop, facilitated by the City's planning consultant was held in mid-June of 2005.

The event began with an individual exercise to identify specific perspectives on the future of Sterling and the Downtown Area. Issues included: most valued aspect of Sterling; threats or challenges facing the city; positive trends/opportunities/assets for Sterling; current city image; downtown image; appropriate role of downtown; favorite places in Sterling to take visitors; places in Sterling to avoid; and communities that Sterling should aspire to be like. Upon completion of this portion, groups discussed their thoughts, and each group prioritized their findings.

Next, the groups were asked to identify areas within the City they believed should be singled out for special focus in the plan. Individuals placed dots on the maps that corresponded to: Sites of high cultural or historic value that should be preserved or restored; Sites and/or buildings that that are



functionally obsolete, vacant, or blighted or where major conflicts with adjoining properties dictate that they be cleared for some other building or use; Areas where public facilities are currently lacking and should be introduced. Public facilities include such things as parks, pedestrian connections, outdoor markets, riverfront access, landscaping, recreation facilities, locations where scenic views should be preserved, etc.; Areas where roadways are in need of improvement or extension, where congestion occurs, where dangerous intersections are located, and the like.

Finally, each individual reviewed the listing of issues generated and selected their top priorities for economic development, physical improvements, public services, and quality of life. The groups then generated short, declarative priority statements to direct where city officials should focus their efforts in guiding the City for the next twenty years. The results were as follows:

- **Economic Development:**
 - Clean up and reclaim the old Northwestern Wire and Steel site
 - Create tax incentives to tear down and replace homes
 - Redevelop brownfield areas
 - Retain existing businesses
 - Diversify: focus on service and high tech type developments
 - Place second generation industry in same areas that have been industrial for the last 100 – 150 years
- **Physical Improvements:**
 - Improve flow of traffic downtown
 - Make downtown business-friendly
 - Continue downtown streetscape
 - Maintain property
 - Continue street, curb & gutter, and sidewalk improvements
 - Rehabilitate residences in older areas
- **Public Services:**
 - Create police substation
 - Establish leaf pick-up in the fall
 - Provide public safety
 - Expand sewer/water services
 - Explore public transportation services
- **Quality of Life:**
 - Strengthen code enforcement
 - Keep Sterling clean and safe
 - Decrease crime/gang/drug issues
 - Create outdoor sports complex for baseball/softball/soccer
 - Form an arts academy
 - Emphasize the arts

2. Focus Group Interviews

Interviews were held with key business leaders, major employers, local businesses, parks and recreation interests, educational leaders, community groups, realtors and developers, local utility suppliers, housing advocates, and neighborhood organizations. The interviews were conducted in mid-June 2005. While this wasn't an "open" participation event, the City selected the participants. The focus groups allowed detailed discussions of specific issues related to the development of this Plan. The primary concerns/issues/recommendations from each of the groups are summarized below:

a. Business/Economic Development

Primary recommendations included:

- Develop a strategy for the revitalization of Downtown Sterling that is focused on historic character, tourism, retail, residential uses.
- Initiate better marketing for Downtown Sterling through a stronger Chamber of Commerce, wayfinding signage, marketing brochures.
- Plan for a new commercial development area for uses that are not appropriate in the Downtown.
- Encourage greater coordination of the roles, priorities, and activities of the various local and regional economic development and business groups.

b. Developers/Builders/Realtors

Primary recommendations included:

- Provide greater Rock River access and visibility as a City responsibility.
- Complete infill development opportunities before allowing rural subdivisions.
- Consider a mix of retail, office, residential, and lodging uses for Downtown redevelopment.
- Plan for senior housing as an increasingly strong market in the future.
- Ensure that regulations, and administration of those regulations, allow for higher density development and a mixture of uses in and near Downtown.

c. Parks and Neighborhood Groups

Primary recommendations included:

- Establish hotels to allow the Park District to host high-profile, national events. Sterling has the facilities to conduct the events, but insufficient housing for participants.
- Continue the development of a community-wide trail/pedestrian network. This includes connections to Rock Falls and Sauk Valley College.
- Enhance public relations so existing residents see the quality of life afforded them.

d. Retail Group

Primary recommendations included:

- Improve commitment of residents to shop at local stores. Customers perceive that they can get more selection, lower prices, and better service elsewhere.
- Extend retail shops' hours to better serve local customers.
- Educate residents about the benefits of spending their dollars at local businesses, with the help of the City and Chamber of Commerce.

e. Transportation and Engineering Issues

Primary recommendations included:

- There are no major initiatives planned.
- Prepare a joint Sterling/Rock Falls Transportation Study. According to the Illinois Department of Transportation, the First Avenue bridge has 10 – 15 years left on two-way traffic capacity.
- Pursue construction of Sterling’s airport. Residential neighborhoods are planned adjacent to the Whiteside County Airport in Rock Falls.
- Continue streetscaping in Downtown.
- Continue to preserve access to the concentric ring roads (Lynn Blvd and Science Ridge Rd) to ensure they remain viable traffic carriers.
- Continue to encourage industrial development nearer the City. New development is poised at the interstate, a few miles outside the City.

f. Community Organizations

Primary recommendations included:

- Consider development of a community center to provide a community gathering spot and a place for youth and elderly activities, in particular.
- Provide a larger outdoor recreation facility including athletic fields.
- Acquire and preserve riverfront properties, and provide multiuse path connections in this area.
- Provide space for community events and music performances along the riverfront.
- Professionalize City staff and provide training/educational opportunities for City officials.

3. Council Study Session

City Staff and the planning consultant conducted a study session with the City Council regarding the Comprehensive Strategic Plan in October 2005. The session began with the Council members individually indicating their opinions on a series of the following issues. The results were immediately compiled and presented to the Council to review and discuss.

a. Existing Planning Framework:

Attitude on the current City Comprehensive Plan. Plan shortcomings. Plan merits.

- Outdated.
- Must better reflect current and attitudes regarding development.
- Good document that served its purpose.
- Should better address specific areas.

b. Community Character:

Features that define Sterling. Community look and feel to residents, businesses, and visitors. Growth improves or diminishes community character. Trends that may affect City character. Recent development meets community expectations. Decision-makers too demanding or too lax regarding development quality.

- Acknowledge positive effects of recent street and hardscape improvements.
- Recognize positive community self-image.
- Address “blight” more aggressively.
- Ensure positives (parks, work ethic, etc.) stay that way.
- Introduce uniformity to development character.

c. Land Use:

Issues regarding the type and quality of land use. Areas of conflicting land uses. Concerns with development in adjacent townships or Rock Falls. Current zoning of properties reflects desired land use. Adequacy of existing zoning and subdivision regulations.

- Ensure neighborhood continuity.
- Promote infill/city development.
- Fill vacant buildings.
- Encourage Downtown residential development.
- Adopt fair and equitable regulations.
- View Rock Falls as a “partner.”

d. Pace of Development:

Current pace of development is appropriate.

- Increase pace.
- Cooperate more with the County.
- Discourage rural development.
- Be more aggressive in redevelopment and attracting developers.

e. Environment:

Key environmental features around the City (e.g., rivers, lakes, wetlands, forests, etc.). Preservation/enhancement opportunities. Natural resources used appropriately. Pollution problems. Stormwater/flooding issues.

- River is a tremendous asset.
- River is underutilized and inaccessible.

f. Housing:

Maintenance and rehabilitation issues. Neighborhoods concerns.

- Need Downtown housing.
- Need affordable housing.
- Encourage/assist housing rehabilitation.
- Preserve neighborhood integrity.
- Encourage/enforce property maintenance.

g. Economic Development:

City's economic development attitude. Satisfaction with development. Key economic development or redevelopment areas. River redevelopment encouragement. Other redevelopment sites. Community incentives to encourage development/job creation.

- City must be pro-business.
- Encourage public/private partnerships.
- Encourage redevelopment.
- Support incubators and entrepreneurialism.
- Consolidate efforts.

h. Transportation:

Transportation concerns (roads, bikeways, railroads, public transportation). “Problem” roads/intersections.

- Improve intersection improvements.
- Provide public transportations.

- Establish commuter rail to Chicago.
 - Enhance more recreational/bicycle trails.
 - Recognize Lynn Blvd as a positive.
 - Keep following Capital Improvement Plan.
- i. Intergovernmental Issues:**
Relationships with surrounding communities. Intergovernmental agreements.
- Coordinate greater collaboration with Rock Falls.
 - Share services more.
 - Remain a progressive City.
 - Put away City’s old attitudes toward other area communities.
- j. Community Facilities and Services:**
Facility space adequacy. Attitudes regarding community services. Park system adequacy. Public utilities capacity. Water quality. Stormwater management.
- Need City Hall space/facility.
 - Need west side police and fire substations.
 - Enhance riverfront accessibility.

4. Department Head Work Session

A lunchtime work session—facilitated by Vandewalle & Associates—was held with the City’s Department Heads and the Administrative Staff in mid-June 2005 to gain insight on a variety of issues from people that are “in the trenches” every day. The following is a summary of the work session:

- Intradepartmental issues are non-existent. Departments are very interactive and cooperative.
- Departments attempt to be very pragmatic regarding development.
- Significant housing concerns
 - Section 8 housing program is causing city-wide problems.
 - Influx of low-income and gang-related issues. A medium security prison is located in Dixon, and Sterling is viewed as a convenient and affordable place to live.
 - There appears to be a “circuit” of communities where Section 8 recipients reside—Sterling, Rockford, Springfield, and Urbana-Champaign.
 - A landlord association has recently begun to address rental issues on a macro level.
 - Housing stock is aging; housing is more “affordable” or converted to rental.
 - Property and building maintenance is a City-wide concern. City is inadequately staffed to effectively enforce issues.
 - Enforcement need has been identified by the Council. No commitment to funding additional staff.
 - Police Department believes that increased property maintenance will result in less police calls for many issues.
 - There is a City-wide need for new housing stock.
- Transportation and Traffic Issues
 - Some congestion. Need a better understanding of which roadways function as arterials.
 - Many roads have a rural cross-section and do not provide adequate capacity.
 - Intersection studies are needed on the west end of the city with the growth of industrial development.

- Educational Issues
 - Over 50-percent of students are eligible for the national school lunch program. (Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents.)
 - There is a “brain drain” occurring in Sterling. Students leave Sterling to attend universities, and do not return to the City.
 - The parochial schools are viewed as higher quality.
- Health Care
 - Community General Hospital Medical Center (CGH) is City-owned and employs more than 850 persons.
 - Doctors are continually recruited-need added incentives.
 - Hospital and clinic are currently in “expansion mode.”
- Manufacturing
 - Once the backbone to the community. Recently many operations have closed/relocated (Northwestern Wire and Steel , Wayne Dalton Overhead Door, Lawrence Hardware).
 - Need to declare the area an Enterprise Zone to attract investment.
- Tourism
 - Build on the history of Sterling.
 - Create museum for Mini Steel Mills such as Northwestern Wire and Steel.
 - Reestablish connection to Rock River.
 - Take advantage of City’s strong recreational presence (i.e. – Sterling Park District and Westwood Sports Complex). Need to complement facility with hotels.
 - Promote existing Sterling events.
 - Taste of Sterling
 - All Aboard
 - Christmas Walk
 - Mexican Parade
 - Concerts at the Grandon Civic Center
- Other Issues
 - Address B-4 zoning district/development at the edge of Downtown.
 - Continue stormwater management measures.
 - Improve Central Business District (CBD) façades.
 - Provide additional parking opportunities Downtown.
 - Improve image of community
 - Better branding
 - Entry features
 - Hardscaping in CBD
 - City-wide beautification

C. Community Goals and Policies

Goals are broad statements that express general public priorities about how to guide preservation and development in the City during the next 20+ years. The *Goal Statements* were identified from the results of the participation events. **Policies** or **strategies** are rules or courses of action used to ensure plan implementation and to accomplish the goals and objectives. The policies/strategies are intended to be used by decision-makers on a day to day basis.

- **Establish a growth strategy that maintains, preserves, and enhances the beauty of the natural environment.** Strategies for achieving this goal statement include: Focusing on infill development, redevelopment, and rehabilitation of areas before annexation; developing a riverwalk/recreational trail system to link the Rock River to the neighborhoods and Downtown, including Rock Falls; limiting growth along natural corridors; considering overlay zoning to protect natural areas, and locating new active recreation areas next to natural areas.
- **Maintain Sterling’s small town atmosphere & quality of life through planned, controlled growth.** Strategies for achieving this goal statement include: Providing incentives for businesses that will serve local consumers to locate Downtown rather than on the outskirts; encouraging smaller residential lots; continuing to support unique events that feature/promote community assets; maintaining cleanliness within the City and enforce personal responsibility; providing incentives to enhance beauty at entrances to City; developing incentives for Downtown businesses to restore building façades; developing plans that encourage neighborhoods with parks, trees, and sidewalks and safe & adequate connections of these neighborhoods to the City’s amenities; planning growth so that it does not affect or deter from the natural beauty; maintaining the Downtown as a social center for the community; promoting incentives for people to purchase and renovate houses within certain proximity to Downtown; specifically designating locations of big box stores; and actively recruiting high quality/paying employers to come to the area.
- **Create unique retail opportunities in the Downtown, riverfront, and Lincoln Highway areas.** Strategies for achieving this goal statement include: Enhancing sidewalk, riverwalk, pedestrian access to businesses; streetscape enhancements; creating cultural downtown riverfront district and provide linkages; relocate incompatible uses along river; encouraging revitalization of historic architecture; improve gateway signage to downtown and neighborhoods; enhancing historical amenities such as the Lincoln Highway; encouraging improved development characteristics such as site design, building materials, and architecture for non-residential development; revitalizing Downtown area residences and apartments; combining marketing efforts to promote tourism and business development; and encouraging trail linkages between Rock Falls, Dixon, and other area communities to Sterling.
- **Promote economic development that attracts & retains fulfilling jobs that pay a family sustaining wage.** Strategies for achieving this goal statement include: Ensuring that there is available land for development; offering educational opportunities to employers that are already in Sterling (offer on-site if possible); identifying sources of venture capital for new and existing industry/business; determining what businesses and industries will create jobs; fostering business friendly policies including local government; assuring reliable infrastructure (housing, power, water, communication, transportation); cultivating stronger relationships between the community and primary employers; and educating and preparing students for the business world.

D. Community-Wide Key Planning Objectives

Objectives are more specific than goals and are usually attainable through planning and implementation activities. The accomplishment of an objective contributes to the fulfillment of a goal. The following is a summary of the key planning issues and their role in the existing conditions and future development and redevelopment of the City of Sterling.

1. Community Character

- Preserve and re-establish attractive entryways to the community and neighborhoods; especially along Lincoln Highway.
- Promote and preserve the historic Downtown area as the City's community center and gathering place.
- Encourage enhancement of current buildings and new buildings that blend with historic and/or neighborhood character through architectural review.
- Approve new development that forwards public objectives, not just to gain tax base.
- Build on Sterling's current reputation as a great place to live.
- Establish high design standards in the City's Zoning Ordinance for buildings, landscaping, signage, exterior lighting, building materials, and parking lots.
- Identify and protect unique historic and archeological areas within the City and planning area.

2. Land Use

- Ensure that the City of Sterling remains defined by its distinct edges and natural features.
- Promote infill development, redevelopment, and rehabilitation of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses as an alternative to growth and development through annexation.
- Encourage mixed-use development, such as neighborhood offices in homes, and living and commercial areas intertwined in development.
- Ensure zoning and building ordinances are promoting new buildings that are of high quality, and that blend with the character of existing development.
- Ensure Downtown buildings are maintained and enhanced.

3. Sustainable Development

- Continue current manageable pace of development (slow/moderate).
- Manage carefully the pace of development to the east/northeast part of the City, and ensure growth is not rampant along Lynn Blvd. and extending toward the Wal-Mart Distribution Center.
- Encourage infill development, redevelopment, and rehabilitation.
- Promote redevelopment, rehabilitation, and infill opportunities in the Downtown, along the Rock River corridor, aging commercial areas, and scattered infill sites in the community to preserve the City's character as a free-standing, compact community with defined edges.
- Minimize conflicts between neighboring land uses through logical land use transitions and buffer yards.
- Achieve a desirable balance and distribution of land uses.
- Use existing public facilities to serve new development whenever possible.
- Require all new development within Sterling's long-term growth area to be served with the full array of municipal services, including sanitary sewer, storm sewer, water, police, and fire, and garbage collection service.

4. Downtown

- Provide for mixed use development in the Downtown area.
- Encourage rehabilitation, redevelopment, and infill development of older areas in the Downtown in a manner which respect's Sterling's character, is compatible with surrounding uses, and improves overall appearance.
- Encourage the development of public access along the Rock River.
- Protect the unique quality of the Downtown by requiring buildings to be two-plus stories with a zero lot line setback requirement
- Facilitate strong stewardship of Downtown among business and property owners.

5. Housing

- Explore new ways of ensuring a mix of housing types and affordability levels, especially to meet the demands for first-time homebuyers and seniors; maintain the predominantly single-family character of the community.
- Maintain and rehabilitate property in older areas/neighborhoods.
- Encourage neighborhood activities (block parties, church festivals, etc.) that actively involve/integrate neighborhood residents.
- Market Sterling as an attractive community for retirees, especially from the Chicago-land area.
- Encourage new residential or mixed use development in Downtown and along the river, especially as the North Western Wire and Steel properties redevelop.
- Design neighborhoods that are pedestrian-oriented and well-served by sidewalks, bicycle routes, and other non-motorized transportation facilities.
- Support infill and redevelopment practices in strategic areas to help diversify the community's housing supply.
- Work with private landowners or housing advocates to market the availability of land for the development or redevelopment of work-force housing.
- Support programs that maintain or rehabilitate the City's existing housing stock.
- Design livable neighborhoods in Sterling that are pedestrian oriented and are generally located within a ten minute walk (approximately 1/3 mile) of a public park, open space area, or greenway.
- Develop and enforce property maintenance codes and outdoor storage codes to maintain neighborhood quality and tax base stability.
- Encourage the preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures in Sterling.

6. Economic Development

- Strive to maintain a high quality of life and keep the cost of living down.
- Pursue aggressive redevelopment of the Northwestern Wire and Steel properties for residential, non-residential, and institutional land uses.
- Continue to provide a strong supply of easy-to-access, serviced and developable land in the City devoted for industrial and commercial land uses.
- Provide for planned commercial development in concentrated areas and discourage unplanned, incremental strip commercial development along major community corridors, particularly along portions of the Lincoln Highway.
- Improve the quality of new non-residential development in community entryway corridors, and particularly at community gateway locations.
- Maintain and enhance Downtown Sterling as the center of unique shopping and entertainment, and professional and government services.
- Encourage infill of vacant parcels and redevelopment of underutilized properties that are already served by utilities.

- Diversify the range of employment opportunities available in the community, with a particular focus on skilled professional and technical jobs.
- Market to the City's strengths and have the discipline to reject "low-hanging fruit" development proposals that conflict with long-term goals.
- Promote regionalism by continuing to work with neighboring communities on regional economic development

7. Environment

- Preserve the area's abundant natural resources.
- Continue enhancement of the Rock River and adjacent corridor, especially in enhancing access and recreational/open spaces along the river corridor.
- Continue to address stormwater issues.
- Extend park system to serve developing areas; provide trail connections to recreational facilities and adjacent/area communities.
- Aggressively work to clean up environmentally contaminated sites within the City.

III. PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the Comprehensive Strategic Plan is intended to provide specific recommendations for the City's land development over the next 20 years and beyond, based on the goals, objectives, and policies presented in Chapter II and Map 8: Opportunity Areas. Long-range land use planning allows municipalities to phase and guide development to maintain the character of the community, protect sensitive environmental features, and provide efficient urban services. Land use planning also enables the City to identify lands well-suited for public purposes such as parks, schools, and drainage facilities.

Illinois Statutes specifically allow cities to prepare plans for lands both inside and currently outside municipal boundaries. To effectively manage growth, this Plan identifies desirable land use patterns within the existing City limits and in unincorporated areas around the City, including all lands within 1½ miles of the City. Intergovernmental coordination and cooperation, therefore, will significantly aid many recommendations of this Plan.

This Plan does not assume that all lands within the extraterritorial jurisdiction will develop during the 20-year planning period. The City advocates a land use pattern that directs growth to areas that can most efficiently be provided with urban services. This generally suggests compact, sequential development out from the existing City limits.

The land use plan, included as Map 6: Planned Land Use – City and Map 7: Planned Land Use – 5-Mile Area, and described later, may be used as a basis to update the City's regulatory tools, such as the zoning ordinance. It should also be used as a basis for all public and private sector development decisions. These include annexations, rezonings, conditional use permits, subdivisions, extension of municipal utilities, and other public or private investments.

However, the identification of growth areas or land use types does not imply that any area is immediately appropriate for rezoning or annexation. Given service demands and other factors, careful consideration to manageable development levels and timing is essential. Except for planned Rural Residential areas, all proposed development areas shown on Map 6 and Map 7 should be incorporated into the City and provided with a full range of urban services, including public sewer and water services.

The Comprehensive Strategic Plan recommendations are the culmination of the analysis of historical trends experienced by the City, a review of the community vision and goals established by the participation efforts, the input of the Plan Commission, City Council, and City's Professional Staff, and the expertise of the City's planning consultant. The City of Sterling was divided into five neighborhood planning areas based upon existing neighborhood character, natural or man-made boundaries, and future land use.

- **Downtown/Riverfront Neighborhood:** Area One generally consists of Downtown, the former Northwestern Wire and Steel lands, and other industrial properties along the Rock River extending from the Upper Dam downstream to the oxbow.
- **West Neighborhood:** Area Two is the recent growth area at the west edge of the City, generally defined by the Lincoln Highway, McCue Road, Griswold Avenue, and the environmental corridor around the wastewater treatment plant.
- **Central Neighborhood:** Area Three contains the core, historic development of the City, and is generally south of Lynn Blvd and between Freeport Road and Griswold Avenue. The area also contains a limited area along the Rock River upstream of the Upper Dam.
- **Northeast Neighborhood:** Area Four contains the northeast commercial corridor along the Lincoln Highway, generally from Freeport Road east to Prairieville Road, and from the Rock River to Holly Road.

- **Extraterritorial Neighborhood:** Area Five contains lands outside *Areas One – Four*, but within a five mile radius of Sterling on the north side of the Rock River.

The following Tables outline neighborhood level housing and demographic data, and provide a glimpse of the composition of these neighborhoods. This data assists in determining the primary issues facing each area and, in conjunction with the participation input, provides direction for neighborhood recommendations.

Table 11: Neighborhood Area Housing Demographics

Area	# of HH	Ave. HH Size	Housing Units	Vacant Units	Owner Occupied Units	% Owner Occupied	Rental Units	% Rental Units
Downtown	575	2.61	635	60	220	34.6%	355	55.9%
West	286	2.38	291	5	236	81.1%	50	17.2%
Central	4,954	2.52	5,194	240	3,512	67.6%	1,442	27.8%
Northeast	760	2.42	824	64	296	35.9%	464	56.3%
Citywide	6,234	2.41	6,596	362	3,924	59.5%	2,310	35.0%

Table 12: Neighborhood Area Population Demographics

Area	2000 Census Pop.	Median Age	Under 5 yrs	Over 65 yrs	Females	% Female
Downtown	1,486	30.5	131	133	714	48.0%
West	727	39.6	61	111	363	49.9%
Central	12,462	37.5	869	2,045	6,490	52.1%
Northeast	1,683	42.0	112	301	894	53.1%
City	15,596	36.3	1,116	2,617	8,094	52.4%

This Plan outlines a series of “strategic development areas” where special planning considerations should be brought to bear. This Plan identifies three types of these strategic development areas:

- Infill
- Rehabilitation
- Redevelopment

These areas will enable the development and redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and municipal, state, and utility services, where practical, and will encourage efficient development patterns that are both contiguous to existing development and at densities which will have relatively low municipal, state governmental, and utility costs. Several areas of opportunity exist in the City which are suitable for development over the 20-year planning period. The following Table outlines the various opportunities, opportunity characteristics, and needed investments in these areas.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING AREAS

Sterling, Illinois

5

- Future development density/character
- Infrastructure improvements
- Corridor preservation/planning
- Housing opportunities
- Riverfront development/redevelopment
- Central business district improvements/reinvestment
- Neighborhood stabilization/gentrification
- Property maintenance
- Gateway identification and enhancements
- Infill development/redevelopment opportunities
- Long-range redevelopment
- Integration of new development
- Development design standards
- Recreational opportunities and connections
- Enhance economic development opportunities

- Future development density/character
- Farm and open space preservation
- New neighborhood development
- Stormwater management
- Development design standards
- Recreational opportunities and connections
- Enhance economic development opportunities

McCue Rd.

2

Lynn Blvd.

3

Locust Street

4

Lynn Blvd.

Ridge Rd.

Stouffer Rd.

Science Ridge Rd.

5

40

2

2

1

Rock River

12th Ave.

30

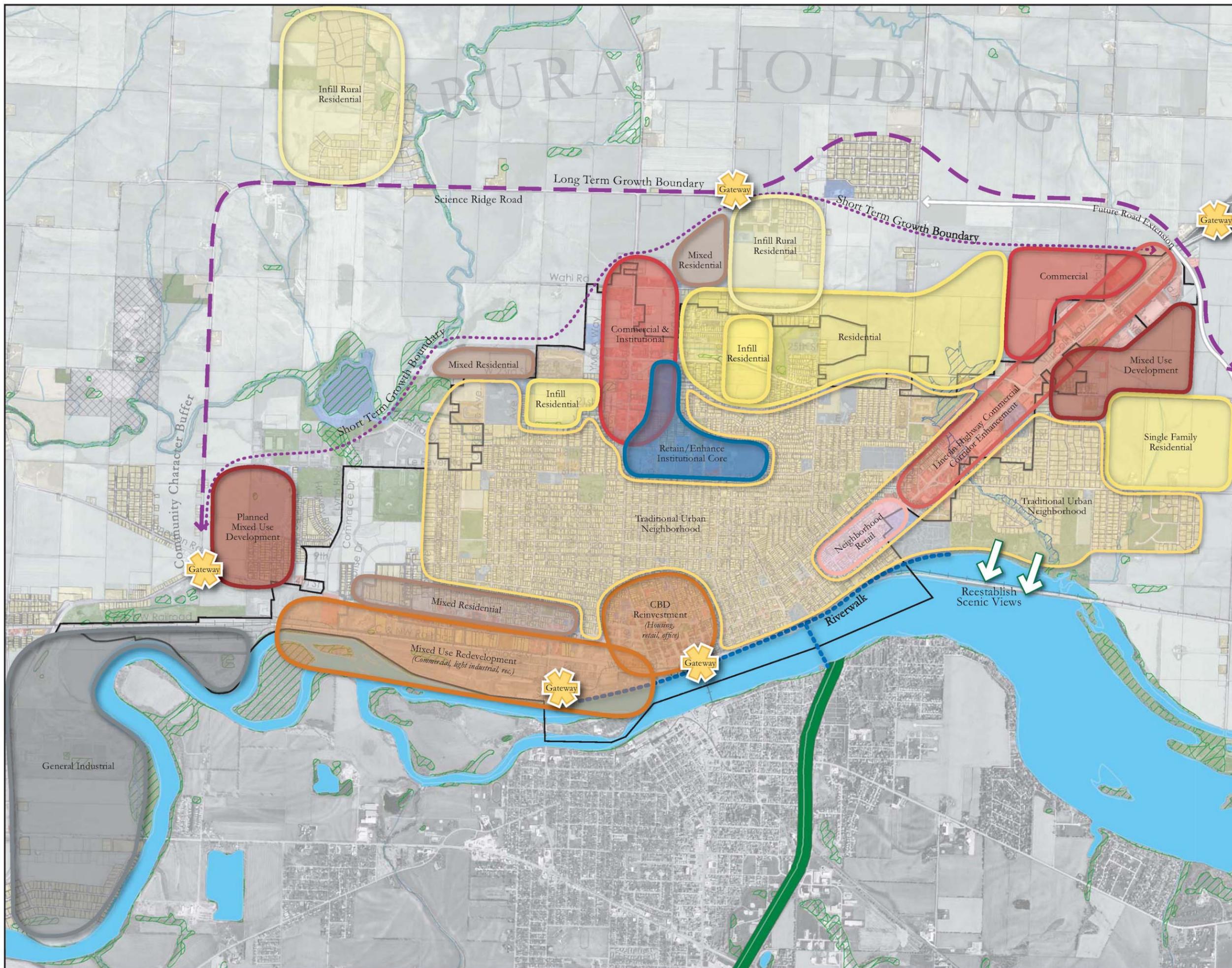
- Future development density/character
- Farm and open space preservation
- New neighborhood development
- Stormwater management
- Integration of new development
- Development design standards
- Recreational opportunities and connections

- Infrastructure improvements
- Corridor preservation/planning
- Housing opportunities
- Riverfront development/redevelopment
- Property maintenance
- Gateway identification and enhancements
- Infill development/redevelopment opportunities
- Long-range redevelopment
- Development design standards
- Recreational opportunities and connections

Map Legend

- Primary Gateway
- Future Roadways

- Future development density/character
- Farm and open space preservation
- New neighborhood development
- Corridor preservation/planning
- Riverfront development/redevelopment
- Stormwater management
- Property maintenance
- Gateway identification and enhancements
- Integration of new development
- Development design standards
- Recreational opportunities and connections
- Enhance economic development opportunities



Planned Land Use - City

-  Corporate Limits
-  Parcels
-  Railroad
-  Floodplains
-  Wetlands
-  Agricultural and Woodland Preservation Areas
-  Single Family Residential - Rural
-  Single Family Residential - Sewered
-  Two-Family/Townhouse Residential
-  Mixed Residential
-  Neighborhood Business
-  General Commercial
-  Downtown
-  Office
-  General Industrial
-  Government and Institutional
-  Parks and Public Recreation
-  Stormwater Management and Passive Recreation
-  Surface Water
-  Vacant
-  Right-of-Way



Date: December, 2005
Source: City of Sterling, U.S. Census, ISGI 1998-1999.



Table 13: Development Opportunities, Characteristics, and Investment

Opportunity	Characteristics	Degree of Investment
Infill	Properties have not developed at this time, but are typically surrounded by existing development.	Public investment has already occurred in the form of infrastructure (sanitary sewer, water, roadways). Properties are ripe for private investment.
Rehabilitation	Existing and viable non-residential or mixed-use areas that appear aesthetically tired or outdated. Need/opportunity for public/private reinvestment exists.	Will require a slight to moderate amount of public reinvestment, typically in infrastructure enhancements and hardscaping. Will require a moderate to significant amount of private investment to enhance/upgrade existing sites or structures.
Redevelopment	Areas are identified by significant blight and neglect, and antiquated platting and operations. Areas appear to have outlived their usefulness, and have undergone a recent (last 30 years), unsympathetic renovation to contemporize them.	Will require a significant amount of public investment in land acquisition and infrastructure improvements to return economic and social viability to area. Will require a moderate to significant amount of private investment in properties to complete the projects begun with public investment.

A. Downtown/Riverfront Neighborhood

1. Riverfront Development/Redevelopment

The Rock River, while an important feature in defining the character of the City, is not a celebrated or well used feature of the community. Despite having several handsome historic buildings and bridges much of the riverfront has a raw, unkempt appearance (due to the City’s industrial history), and is lined by declining and defunct industrial uses. Debris has collected along the riverbanks. Large areas of riverfront are privately controlled, (Northwestern Wire and Steel, National Hardware, Lawrence Hardware, and others) fenced off and inaccessible to the public. There is a significant amount of underutilized land along the river. With few exceptions, the entrance to the riverfront lacks a sense of entry or arrival. Moreover, the lack of public space along the river downplays one of the City’s most remarkable resources.



The City, along with the various economic development entities, must bring greater attention to the Rock River riverfront area. Action must be taken to rehabilitate the river itself and redevelop the adjacent lands. A Downtown Master Plan should be undertaken to create a Downtown/riverfront-specific redevelopment strategic plan. The plan should provide a framework outlining issues, opportunities, physical improvements, policies, and advocacy “for the River and its environs.”

This *Comprehensive Strategic Plan* recommends the following for the Rock River corridor and adjacent lands:

- Relocate larger, more industrial uses away from the river and into the existing Sterling industrial/business parks to encourage development of more active space along the river.
- Develop more mixed-use opportunities along the river that include retail, office, entertainment, live/work, apartment, and condominium opportunities.
- Develop a City-wide riverwalk system, specifically focusing on a walkway along the Union Pacific rail corridor. Connections from the riverwalk trail to the City can be provided through/underneath the existing historic viaducts.
- Create active space along the riverwalk that encourages pedestrian and bicycle use.
- Create more pedestrian entrances onto a riverwalk and enhance pedestrian access through various, clearly marked paths.
- Incorporate the riverwalk with regional trails (such as the Upper Dam and Hennepin Canal trails), the historic Downtown, and the historic Dillon Home Museum and Sinnissippi Park.
- Attract a hotel to locate on a riverfront development site.
- Establish or maintain easements along the riverwalk to ensure a continuous riverwalk rather than one that is broken up by private property.



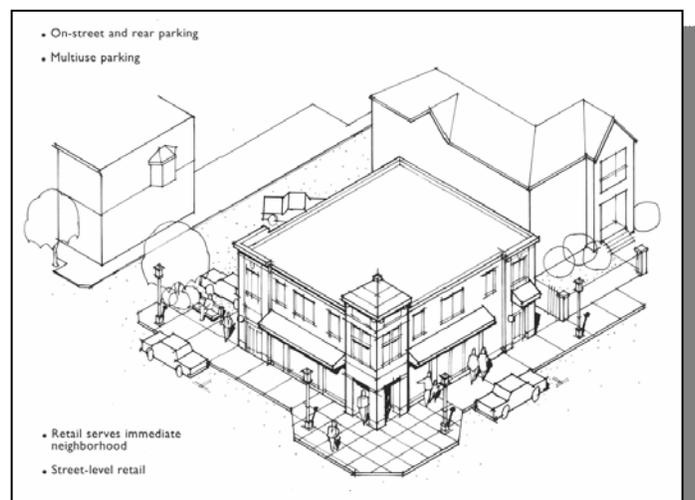
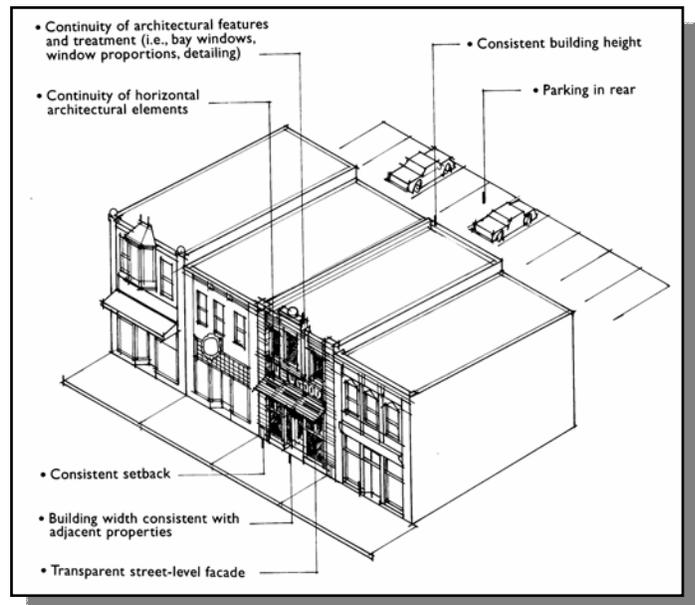
- Maintain river viewsheds by preventing the riverfront from becoming solidly developed. Use courtyards and arcades—especially for the redevelopment of the industrial sites—for more porous development that preserves river views (such as the views down streets that run from north to south).
- Create a statutory redevelopment plan to outline and direct redevelopment efforts spearheaded by the City and the Community Development Authority.
- Take a proactive role in site acquisition, relocation, and clean up.

2. Central Business District Improvements/Reinvestment

Downtown Sterling's central location is well-positioned to continue to attract civic, retail and service uses and remain the vital heart of the community over the planning period. Downtown Sterling should remain intact with a mixture of land uses, especially commercial and residential. Reinvestment in Downtown Sterling should reflect the historic pattern of pedestrian-oriented indoor commercial, office, institutional, residential, and urban open space uses with streetscaping and low-key signage. Important community character elements include, density and intensity of development, building scale, building location, architecture, signage, public furnishings and spaces, and landscaping.

To maintain the health and vitality of the Downtown, creative and coordinated planning and marketing will be required. This *Plan* recommends the preparation of a Downtown Master Plan for the Downtown area. Preparation of a Downtown master plan will assure the desired character is maintained, appropriate uses and strategies for redevelopment of key sites are identified, historically and architecturally significant buildings are not destroyed, and tools to promote redevelopment (e.g., Tax Incremental Financing (TIF), Business Improvement District (BID), and Sewer Service Area (SSA) districts, sign ordinance, zoning district amendment, brownfield clean-up procedures, tax credits) are explored and implemented. This *Plan* recommends the following rehabilitation and redevelopment principles be considered in any Downtown master planning effort:

- Promote the expansion, retention, and upgrading of specialty retail, restaurants, financial services, offices, professional services, and community uses through marketing, investment and incentive strategies.
- Encourage the enhancement of Downtown parking lots by installing landscaping (trees, plants, landscape islands, etc.).



- Link the Downtown district to the Rock River, through the development of pedestrian paths and the redevelopment of parcels between the River and 2nd Street.
- Encourage new residential development and redevelopment within the Downtown area, particularly around the Coliseum building, along the rail corridor, around the Grandon Civic Center and the Library Plaza to provide a “built-in” market for goods and services and increase foot traffic. The adaptive re-use of the older warehouses along the rail corridor into residential housing should be explored.
- Continue to renovate and restore historically significant buildings in the Downtown area through a façade improvement program.
- Continue to retain community facilities in the Downtown area, including city hall, library, and post office.
- Continue to promote existing Downtown activities (such as the civic concerts), while attracting new events into the area such as a farmers’ market.
- Assist in the relocation of uses with outdoor storage needs to more appropriate areas in the City.
- Mobilize stronger private-sector leadership for Downtown.

3. Neighborhood Stabilization

The recent private reinvestment of the grand, historic homes along West 3rd Street could become a catalyst to developing a *Historic Overlay District* for the community. The residences along West 3rd Street are sufficient in number to be demarcated by an historic designation, and the City should work with the State to provide low-interest, façade-enhancement monies to assist their rehabilitation.

An historic overlay district could be extended to much of the Downtown area. The City, perhaps with the assistance of the Community Development Authority, should encourage the rehabilitation of these areas through articulating a vision for the West 3rd Street corridor. The City should begin efforts to “soften” the appearance of the West 3rd Street corridor through the development of streetscaping as it has for other downtown areas.

Once a district or single property is listed on the State or National Register, there are economic incentives available to commercial land owners interested in protecting their properties. These incentives help offset additional costs that may be necessary to comply with other, more regulatory aspects of an historic preservation program. The primary economic incentive for historic preservation is in the form of tax credits. These tax incentives are available for income-generating buildings that are listed, or eligible for listing, on the State and National Register of Historic Places. Property owners can qualify for a 20% federal Investment Tax Credit (ITC) to rehabilitate their historic commercial, industrial, and rental residential properties. All work must comply with federal guidelines established in the Secretary of Interior’s *Standards for Historic Building Rehabilitation*.

These historic neighborhoods surrounding the Downtown area should be encouraged to remain intact. Over the planning period, the City should monitor any movement to convert existing residences into retail and office units within the areas surrounding the Central Business District; areas of the City currently zoned B-4 Office Business District. The B-4 District allows such conversions upon approval of the City. Too many conversions in certain blocks may change neighborhood character. Additionally, the presence of the B-4 District results in a number of existing uses being categorized as “legal, nonconforming.” This does not encourage new residential



investment or reinvestment in existing residential developments. The City may need to undertake a “proactive zoning” initiative to limit the ability of existing structures to be utilized for more intensive operations (i.e. – inappropriate commercial uses, mixed residential, etc.). While proactive zoning can be unpopular because it is initiated by government, with effective public education and outreach, the City can garner support from residents to preserve the character of their neighborhoods.

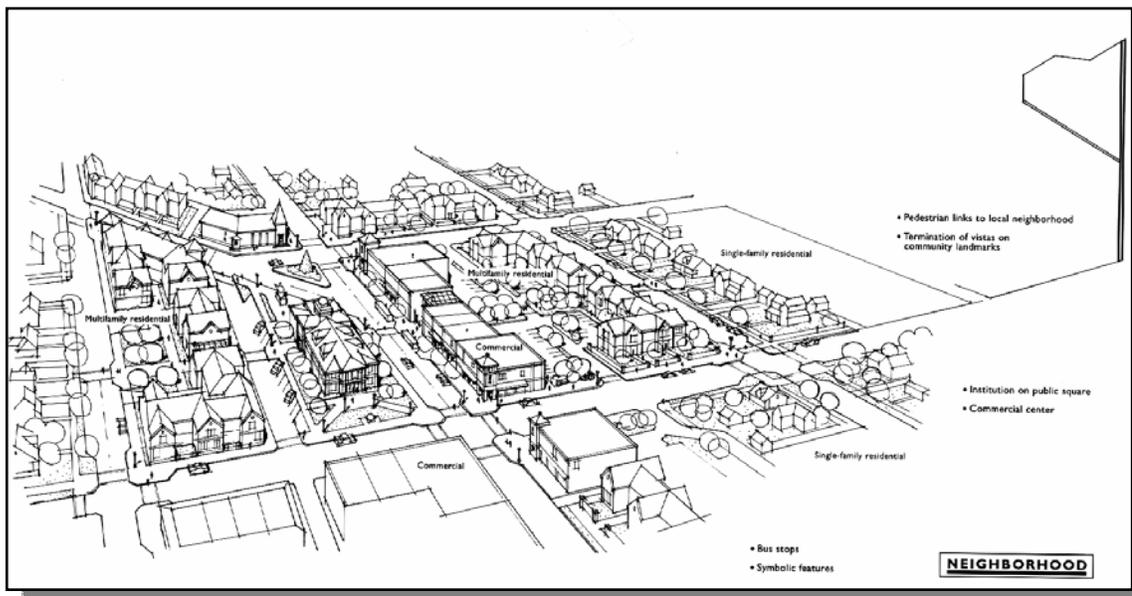
By the same token, the City must discourage the conversion of older homes in neighborhoods from converting into duplexes or apartments. This also will alter the character of neighborhoods by creating on- and off-street parking issues and degrade the charm, character, and craftsmanship of individual homes.

Finally, the Downtown area is the commercial hub and the institutional center to the community. The area contains restaurants, professional offices, governmental agencies, theaters, taverns, limited housing, and retail and institutional establishments. However, the area contains a number of users with outdoor storage needs that are inappropriate in a Downtown setting. And while many of the businesses “fit” within the historic setting architecturally, some storefronts and businesses do not fit with the established aesthetic framework. Again, there is an opportunity for the City and the Economic Development Associations (EDA) to facilitate the relocation of some businesses to more appropriate areas in the community or to encourage façade rehabilitation by providing low-interest loans to assist businesses with façade improvements. The City and the EDAs should increase communications and activities with Downtown businesses through mutually sponsored events and community interests on the square. The City and Community Development Authority should encourage the creation/expansion of a BID or SSA for businesses to initiate and direct Downtown improvements.

B. West Neighborhood

1. New Neighborhood Development

Increasingly, communities are planning areas for mixed use development that contains a mix of non-residential and residential uses—particularly commercial and residential uses. This mixture occurs on the same site, in the same building, or both. This type of development scheme has several advantages, including providing built-in residential markets for commercial enterprises, promoting walking and limiting auto trips, creating active, vibrant places, and diversifying development risk. This *Plan* advises mixed use development and redevelopment in several parts of the City (*see Map 6*).



MIXED USE CENTERS

Mixed Use Centers are designed to create vibrant, pedestrian environments in which people can live, work, shop and obtain daily services. Buildings with different uses, sometimes even on different floors, are arranged within walking distance to each other and are connected via sidewalks. Obtaining moderate to higher densities and paying close attention to design and quality are critical aspects of mixed use centers.

Characteristics of Mixed Use Centers include:

- Walking relationship between uses
- Street activity from morning through evening
- Multi-story buildings, generally with more active uses on first floor
- Minimal front setbacks
- Buildings and sites designed for pedestrians not automobiles
- Parking located on streets, to rear of buildings, and/or in structures
- Transit service potential
- Building entrances oriented to street

Typical Mixed Use Center Land Uses:

- Multiple family and attached housing
- Offices
- Clinics
- Restaurants, including outdoor dining
- Coffee shop
- Deli/market
- Grocery store
- Urban gathering spaces (e.g. farmer's market)
- Dry cleaner
- Day care
- Drug store



A Retail/Residential Above



B Retail/Office Flex Space



C Retail



D Multi-Family Residential



E Office/Residential Above



F Gas Station - 2nd Floor Office - Fuel Pumps in Back



Vandewalle & Associates
 Architects, Planners
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The graphic titled “Mixed Use Centers” highlights the components and considerations for successful mixed-use development. Each area has different issues, geography, size, existing development, and other characteristics that must be considered in their design. Of critical importance to these areas is ensuring very careful planning and high-quality design.

Appropriate development includes uses that complement the Westwood Sports Complex, hotel/motel, restaurants, bicycle shop or sporting goods, and quality apartments or condominiums.

2. Integration of New Development

This *Plan* illustrates areas along the Lincoln Highway that are appropriate for mixed residential development. Many of the existing structures and uses along the highway that were developed during the past war period are in need of redevelopment. The presence of the historic industrial development, heavy traffic, and the newer industrial/business park development will limit the types of uses that are suitable in this area. Mixed residential development containing duplexes, townhomes, attached single-family, multi-family, and condominium structures meet these criteria.

Older areas in the City have a historical land use pattern which generally transitions from traditional single-family areas to small-scale commercial development in the Downtown area. Although most of the modern development on the edges of the community contains similar types of transitions, individual subdivisions and projects sometimes exhibit jarring transitions and exist in isolation from each other. This results in a defensive, rather than inviting, relationship between subdivisions, buildings, the sidewalk system, and the street.

The City must pay careful attention to creating more cohesive patterns of land use that transition in a gentle fashion. The most effective transitions of land use occur where residential densities (as defined by the number of dwelling units per acre) and non-residential intensities (as defined by floor area ratios or the percentage of land left in green space) are relatively consistent, even though dwelling unit types or land uses may vary significantly. The creation and careful application of zoning districts which encourage uses of similar density or intensity make for more effective transitions between adjacent zoning districts and adjacent parcels in the same district.

3. The Urban-Rural Edge

Visually distinguishing the edges of a community is a very important tool for protecting community identity and ensuring the wise use of land. Clearly defined community edges create the distinctions between “City and country.” Sterling has gradually lost these clear-cut community edges at its gateways. The combination of views, open space features and architectural styles or urban forms which create these edges should be recognized and protected, as these edges contribute significantly to Sterling’s character. The City will be especially hard-pressed to maintain a community separation area with the recent extension of sanitary sewer and public water to serve development near the I-88 interchange. By establishing growth boundaries (discussed later in this document) and developing gateway features, the City can begin to reclaim its edges.

C. Central Neighborhood

1. Housing Opportunities

The City should continue to support programs that provide affordable housing to low- and moderate-income families in the community. There are a number of state and federal housing programs available to assist in promoting affordable, elderly, and assisted housing. Federal housing agency Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is active in the County. State agencies working in the County include the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Illinois Housing Development Authority, and the Whiteside County Housing Authority. The following is a brief description of some programs offered/available:

- **Public Housing, owned and managed by the Whiteside County Housing Authority.** A family generally pays 30% of their adjusted income for rent. The rent that is received is not adequate to operate and maintain the public housing. So the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development executes what is called an “Annual Contributions Contract” with the housing authority, to provide an operating subsidy to assist in covering the utilities.
- **Section 8 New Construction.** This program is used by private developers who obtain financing and agree to build housing that will be subsidized upon completion, for a specified number of years. The subsidy is in the form of a Housing Assistance Payments contract. The contract states that for every eligible tenant in the building, within an agreed-to maximum, HUD will provide a subsidy. The subsidy is the difference between the rent the tenant pays (which is determined by a formula) and the rent HUD determines is appropriate.
- **Tax Credits.** The low income housing tax credit program or LIHTC was created under the Tax Reform Act of 1986, as an alternate method for funding housing for low to moderate-income households. The tax credits are issued by the IRS to the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA). The tax credits are determined by the costs of the development. Then IHDA screens any proposed housing projects and determines which developer will be awarded the tax credits. The tax credits then pass to the syndicator, who gets the financing from investors, to whom the syndicator passes the tax credits.
- **LIPH - Low-Income Public Housing.** Public Housing Authority owned and operated. HUD-assisted for debt service and operations.
- **221d3.** Privately owned projects with either below-market interest rate loans or market-rate loans with a subsidy to the tenants provided by HUD.
- **S8/NC - Section 8 New Construction and Substantial Rehabilitation.** HUD provides a rent subsidy to the owner for the difference between tenant's ability to pay and the contract rent.
- **S8/EX, S8/VR, S8/MR.** Section 8 Existing, Section 8 Voucher, Section 8 Mod Rehab: Existing units are selected by the tenant and HUD provides a subsidy to the owner for the difference between tenant's ability to pay and the contract rent.
- **S/236 - Section 236.** HUD provides assistance to the owner to reduce the costs for the tenant by paying most of the interest on a market-rate mortgage. Additional rental subsidy may be provided to the tenant.
- **S/515 - Section 515(I.C.).** Rural Economic Community Development Services (RECDS) provides below-market rate loans to owners to reduce costs to tenants. Additional rental subsidy may be provided.

- **S/202 – Section 202.** HUD provides a direct loan to nonprofit organizations for project development and rent subsidy for low-income tenants. Several Section 202 units are designed for physically handicapped, developmentally disabled, and chronically mentally ill residents.

The City can work with Whiteside County Housing Authority to establish a housing coalition. This coalition will conduct a needs assessment to inventory the housing stock and identify housing issues and opportunities within Sterling. After conducting this needs assessment, the coalition will determine what should be done to improve the quality and affordability of the City's housing stock. Sample programs include, "Rent Smart," which educates low-income families about skills for communicating with landlords and neighbors. This program seeks to break down barriers for people receiving housing assistance and is offered throughout the year.

The City might wish to explore the development of a housing trust fund. A housing trust fund is a pool of money available for housing projects for middle or lower income households. The fund is used to fill financial gaps to make housing projects feasible. Trust funds are replenished on an annual basis or they may be designed to be perpetual and self-sustaining. Revolving funds are sustained by the payments of loan recipients which are then used to supply additional loans.

In addition, the City should encourage infill development on vacant or under-used lots within the built-up area of Sterling as a means to promote affordable housing. As a next step, the City may develop a more detailed inventory of potential vacant and underutilized sites, and distribute this inventory to home builders and other housing providers. In addition, the City should adopt more flexible regulations to allow development of irregular or substandard infill lots, allow mixed uses for infill developments to enhance the economic feasibility; and even assist in the acquisition, clearance, and consolidation of infill lots into larger, more easily developed sites. Land costs can be up to twenty-five percent or more of the total costs for a home. Smaller lot sizes reduce land costs, which in turn can make owner-occupied housing more affordable.

2. Infill Development/Redevelopment Opportunities

There are areas within the community which are available for residential infill development that can be served by existing, adjacent public utilities. The lands south of West 23rd Street (between F Avenue and J Avenue) and the lands west of Thomas Park (north of Lynn Blvd.) are particularly ripe for infill opportunities. Some mixed residential development may be necessary to buffer single-family from the adjacent roadways. Significant landscape buffering will also need to be incorporated into future residential development in this area.

The City should encourage new residential development on existing platted and fully improved lots, and small unplatted parcels that had been passed over, before extending urban services to new areas for residential development. To gain a better understanding of the infill development potential in Sterling's mainly built-up areas, the City should conduct an inventory of all vacant, developable parcels and lots; identify factors that have resulted in them remaining vacant; and develop approaches to encourage their development as appropriate. The City should also support redevelopment or rehabilitation of older residential properties. Property maintenance codes should be strongly enforced in Sterling's older neighborhoods.

With waterfront lots at a premium in Sterling and homebuyers increasingly wanting more space, the City will likely see more interest in "tear-downs" and replacement of what were previously riverfront cottages into larger, permanent homes. Across the nation, this phenomenon of replacing existing traditional-style homes with much larger homes has threatened to erode distinct neighborhoods and community character. In Sterling, this "tear down" issue will likely play out on lots along the Rock River and within in/around the "mansion row" and the hospital. The City may need to amend its residential zoning district to specifically mitigate some of the negative implications associated with these types of modifications. Common approaches include:

- Establishing maximum building coverage requirements. Maximum building coverage ratios can minimize the appearance of bulk and preserve open space.
- Reducing the maximum height allowed for a structure.
- Increasing minimum side yard setbacks to provide additional light and air onto the lot.
- Setting restrictions on home and garage roof angles to ensure that light is not blocked on abutting lots.
- Considering maximum building size standards

3. Neighborhood Stabilization

The *Central Neighborhood* planning area actually consists of a number of smaller neighborhoods that are generally centered around parks, churches, commercial nodes, or transportation corridors. Each neighborhood in Sterling appears to cater to a specific socio-economic group, and each of these neighborhoods relates to one another contextually to create the social fabric that is the City of Sterling. Consequently, the maintenance of neighborhood composition is paramount to achieving community stability to ensure the strength of the community's social fabric continues. Moreover, the transition from one neighborhood to the next must remain defined, and in some instances, enhanced.

Building maintenance and rehabilitation will be a key concern in the central single-family residential area over the planning period. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census indicates that much of Sterling's housing stock was built before 1940 (90-percent was constructed before 1970), and many of these homes are located in this central residential area. The City should work with the County, the State and local lenders to assist homeowners and landlords with rehabilitation projects. The City should also work with the local and County Historical Societies and property owners to protect and celebrate historically significant residences within the community. The mature trees that line most of the streets in the central residential area should also be preserved to the greatest extent possible, and replaced where necessary.

The City should develop Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAP) to address neighborhood-level concerns and issues. A SNAP is a community-driven partnership approach to neighborhood investment. It empowers neighborhoods to take control of their own future, have a say in resource allocation decisions, and set local priorities. In the future, when neighborhoods make requests for City government resources, they will be asked: "Do you have a neighborhood plan, and how does this fit into it?" Spending and other resource allocation must be strategic.

Additionally,

- City government should provide a basic level of service to improve the quality of life in every neighborhood.
- Neighborhood stabilization and enhancement is not just the City government's responsibility.
 - Neighborhood organizations must organize themselves; speak with one voice; and prioritize their wants and needs.
 - Neighborhoods that take these steps will be supported through matching grants, participation in market-based programs and other means.
- City government should support neighborhood leaders who are working to help themselves.
- City government should employ a market-based approach to community development, which builds from strengths and takes advantage of unique opportunities.
 - In one neighborhood that strength might be a church or school, in another it might be a hospital, in another it might be a park, in another it might be homeownership, or a large number of vacant houses that can be leveled and redeveloped.

- All City Departments must participate in developing and implementing neighborhood strategies, not just Community Development.
 - The Sterling Park District, the School District, Public Works, Police, and City Manager must participate in developing strategies.
 - Strategies must be tracked to determine their impact in neighborhoods.
 - Strategic investments should be made that improve neighborhoods.
- City government should enable and empower community organizations.
 - Sometimes that means providing tools for neighborhood improvement.
 - Sometimes that means stepping aside, as in the case of property acquisitions.
- City government should match tools to neighborhood conditions.
 - The City recognizes which neighborhoods are stable, and which are distressed and that they have different needs.
 - Each neighborhood requires some level of support; ranging from simply picking up trash in a reliable manner to reducing crime to enabling large-scale redevelopment.

4. Long-Range Redevelopment

Experience in the City, and around the country, clearly indicates that the redevelopment and rehabilitation sites do not redevelop themselves – even in places with proximity to high traffic counts and high-income wage earners. Instead, careful planning, site assessment, public-private partnerships, redevelopment incentives, and persistence over a number of years are required. Proactive Plan Commission, City Council and Community Development Authority involvement is critical, as is coordination with property owners, neighborhood organizations, and area businesses. To guide such efforts, a carefully crafted sequence of steps and redevelopment tools are needed, followed by an integrated set of implementation activities. A statutory Redevelopment Plan should be prepared for each of these areas, and should serve as the primary coordination mechanism.

Typically, this type of detailed planning and implementation process includes:

- Evaluating the planning area’s condition including size, visibility, viewsheds, access, building quality, existing use viability, adjacent land uses, topographic or environmental constraints, brownfield site assessment and existing infrastructure and amenities.
- Conducting a regional and local economic opportunities analysis to focus on the City’s location, amenities, and business mix, as well as the assessment of regional factors such as economics, transportation patterns and intergovernmental relationships.
- Identifying goals and objectives for the redevelopment area through cooperative efforts with private property owners and other key stakeholders. This step also typically identifies and prioritizes redevelopment sites within the planning area.
- Conducting a market assessment for the redevelopment site to determine the role of the site within the marketplace, provide demographic trade area information to assist in the solicitation of potential developers or site users, and identify the range of specific issues and challenges to site redevelopment.
- Preparing a redevelopment strategy and district concept plan map that identifies the highest and best land uses, site characteristics, design approaches, and implementation strategies for the planning area, with particular attention to priority redevelopment sites.

Aggressively pursuing implementation through techniques such as adoption of a statutory redevelopment plan; establishment of a redevelopment tax increment financing district; possible brownfield remediation; possible site acquisition, consolidation, and demolition; and developer recruitment.

This Plan strongly promotes redevelopment of the non-residential areas of the *Central Neighborhood* that have neared the end of their life-cycle. This is specifically true of land uses along the Lincoln Highway and along Locust Street. The City must work cooperatively with the local Economic Development Organizations to outline a detailed redevelopment plan, for these areas.

It is paramount to ensure the livability of the area around the hospital in order to attract quality health care professions, but also to ensure future facility growth for the hospital and adjacent clinic. While it is difficult to predict the future direction of the health care industry during this planning process, a separate SNAP planning process can better address the desired direction and needs of the area.

The commercial development along Locust Avenue and near Lynn Boulevard appears in need of façade improvements. The City and the Economic Development Organizations should explore opportunities to provide low-interest, façade improvement loans to spur the rehabilitation of properties and buildings. The City and Economic Development Organizations should also work with the property owners of incompatible land uses to assist in their relocation to more compatible areas of the community. This will potentially “free-up” land area for reinvestment.

Additionally, there are a number of dilapidated or vacant structures and properties located along the Lincoln Highway. Again, the City must cooperate with the local Economic Development Organizations to identify and prioritize the redevelopment of these sites. The existing appearance portrays a community in distress and on a downward slide. The redevelopment could include modest housing developments or neighborhood commercial that includes upper story residential opportunities. Assembling a sufficient number of properties to accommodate larger-scale development is unlikely, so pursuing smaller/modest development is the proper course of action.

D. Northeast Neighborhood

1. Future Development Density/Character

This Plan strongly recommends that new areas of residential development be developed as neighborhoods, rather than merely an assemblage of subdivisions. To accomplish this, this Plan encourages that future neighborhoods include a variety of housing choices, and also provide for a mix of non-residential uses such as parks, schools, religious institutions and small-scale shopping and service areas – as deemed appropriate by the developer, the Plan Commission and City Council working together.

This strategy specifically applies to the areas identified for *residential* and *mixed-use* development. These concepts encourage a mix of predominantly detached *single-family residential* development (minimum of 60% of the dwelling units) with well-designed, *two-family or attached single-family residential* (maximum of 15% of the dwelling units), *Mixed Residential* (maximum of 25% of the dwelling units), *institutional*, *public open space*, *neighborhood office*, and *neighborhood business* uses. This planning concept disperses higher density development throughout the community and limits the concentration of any one type of development in any one area. Realizing these *planned neighborhoods* will require the use of complementary vehicle and pedestrian transportation networks, and urban design strategies including the preservation and enhancement of vistas, neighborhood gathering places, and visual focal points.

The ability to provide a sound design of such complexity will require the use of **Detailed Neighborhood Plans** prepared by the City, and adopted as a component of the City’s Comprehensive Strategic Plan. Such plans shall specify land use mix, density, street layouts, open space, stormwater management, etc. These Detailed Neighborhood Plans should be considered as the baseline upon which more refined subdivision plans could be proposed by the development community. Where developers can demonstrate an improvement over a Detailed Neighborhood

Plan, the City should adopt such improvements as an amendment to the Detailed Neighborhood Plan and this *Plan*.

The result of this proposed detailed planning and design process will be new neighborhoods which capture much of the charm and unique character of the best historic neighborhoods in the community, with the added benefit of more completely coordinated land use, open space, and transportation patterns. Areas planned in this manner will be more marketable to a greater diversity of ages, incomes and lifestyles, and will typically appreciate in value faster than single-use neighborhoods which employ “cookie cutter” street patterns, lot sizes, and structures over very large areas that become indistinguishable from each other. The combination of a fine-grained land use pattern with careful aesthetic planning is one of the critical factors in creating the lasting charm of historic cities such as Sterling.



More specifically, *Planned Neighborhood* areas are intended to provide a highly planned mix of residential dwelling units and density types; neighborhood-oriented shopping opportunities, such as a small grocery store, barber shop, bakery, or pharmacy; a range of employment opportunities (usually located on the edges of these neighborhoods); and educational facilities (usually elementary schools) for area residents. These neighborhoods should be connected to other neighborhoods by a network of streets that discourage high travel speeds but still allow access to emergency and maintenance vehicles (e.g. fire trucks and snow plows).

This planning concept disperses higher density development throughout the community and limits the concentration of any one type of development in any one area. Realizing these *Planned Neighborhoods* will require the use of complementary vehicle and pedestrian transportation networks, urban design strategies including the preservation and enhancement of vistas, neighborhood gathering places, and visual focal points.

2. Riverfront Development/Redevelopment

Contrary to what some residents have expressed during public participation events, the riverfront is not a celebrated or well used feature of the community. Despite having several handsome historic buildings and bridges, much of the riverfront has a raw, unkempt appearance (again, due to the significant industrial presence along the Rock) and large amounts of debris have collected along the riverbanks and shoals. Large areas of riverfront are privately controlled and are fenced off and inaccessible to the public.

By creating more pedestrian entrances to the riverwalk and by enhancing pedestrian access through various clearly marked paths, pedestrians will be more likely to use the riverwalk. Connecting the northern end of a riverwalk to Sinnissippi Park would provide opportunities to use alternative transportation to travel to Downtown locations. Linking the riverwalk to regional bicycle trails will integrate the riverwalk into the local transportation network and provide safer and more pleasant routes for bicyclists and pedestrians. The river and the riverwalk system must also be incorporated into the visual experience of the City. Maintaining view corridors to the river along extended east-west rights of way is another way to protect visual access to the river. Selective clearing in Sinnissippi Park will return the magnificent views the park offers to the Rock River, the rail trestle, and Rock Falls.

The City must also enhance the general condition of the riverbanks where postponed repairs and public improvements may be impeding private development. These include both engineered improvements to the urban riverfront, shoreline restoration and debris removal in the more naturalized parts of the river. Many of the existing seawalls need to be replaced or reinforced, and at least one bridge needs to be completely renovated. Ideally much of this work should be done focusing on how it can accommodate or advance the creation of a continuous riverwalk/river-trail system. Repairs should be coordinated with private development efforts whenever possible.

3. Integration of New Development

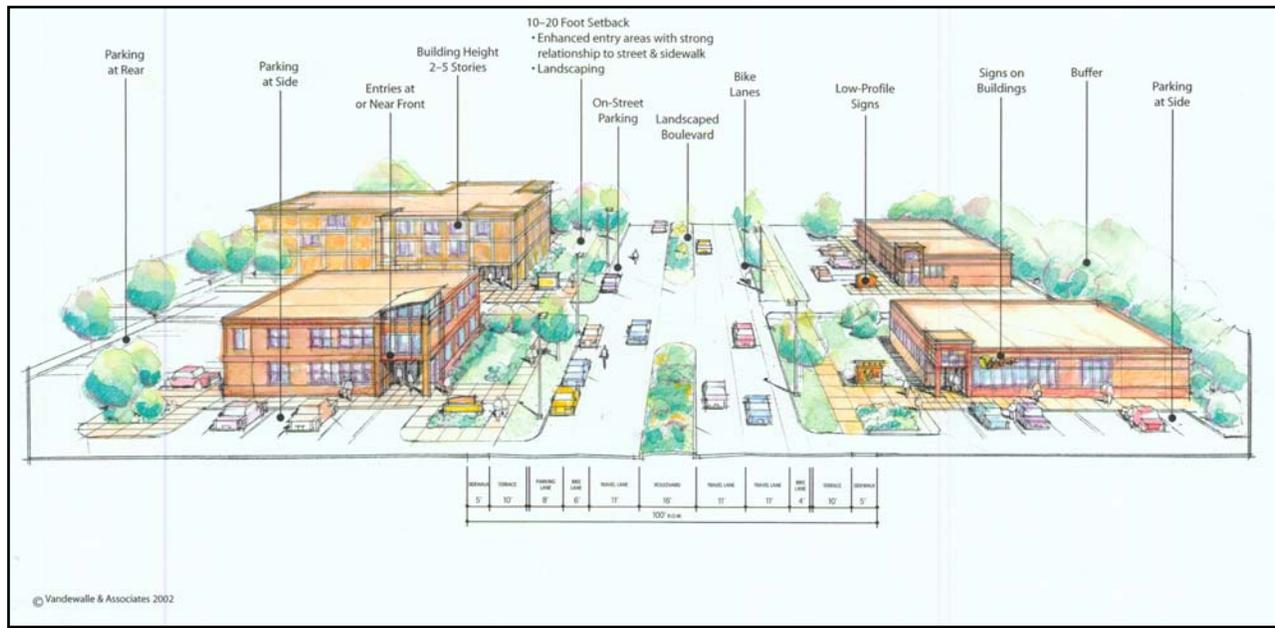
There is a considerable amount of vacant or underutilized acreage in this neighborhood to accommodate new development. As such, new development must not over-power existing development in both scale and massing. New investment in this area has the opportunity to “raise the bar” in terms of site design, landscaping, access, architecture, signage, and lighting to affect the entire community.

Consistency of building scale—height, width, area, and density or intensity—on adjacent and nearby properties or zoning districts is extremely important in creating a harmonious development pattern. With the exception of carefully designed and properly sited institutional uses, large differences in building scale on adjacent parcels are disruptive to an urban fabric. For example, proposed townhouses, multiple family residential buildings, or commercial and industrial structures which are inconsistent with a smaller scale of surrounding buildings should locate somewhere else or incorporate design elements that create an appearance of several smaller structures. Maintaining consistent building scale may be obtained through the application of appropriate zoning districts and detailed design review with reference to surrounding properties and buildings.

Consistent building setbacks are also important to define a visually pleasing and historically sensitive development character in both residential and non-residential areas. Often, communities are successful in achieving desired minimum setbacks, but not in achieving desired maximum setbacks. The result is frequently a hodge-podge of buildings set back anywhere from the minimum setback to up to a couple hundred feet behind the minimum setback. In general, front building setbacks in Sterling should be modest in deference to the historic character of development.

4. Enhance Economic Development Opportunities

There are areas along the Lincoln Highway that are currently ripe for redevelopment. Strategic infill development/redevelopment activities should be encouraged by the City and local Economic Development Organizations through assisting with site assembly and project funding sources. General commercial and industrial land uses have developed over a number of decades as a result of the highway's presence.



As traffic along the Lincoln Highway increases over the planning period, the *Northeast Neighborhood* area will continue to be attractive to commercial and employment uses looking for high visibility and convenient access. As opportunities for reinvestment and redevelopment occur, the appearance of building facades exposed to public view, including loading docks and storage areas, should be improved. Vacant parcels in this area are still recommended for commercial uses, incorporating the highest standards in building design, site layout, landscaping, signage, parking, and access. Office uses are also appropriate in this area, where the impact of surrounding uses on their operation will be negligible (e.g., noise, emissions, heavy trucking activity, etc.).

Areas adjacent to the Lincoln Highway help define this key entryway into the City and, as such, create opportunities for establishing a positive, distinctive image for Sterling. This *Plan* recommends *mixed use* development for this area (see Map 6) organized around creating an attractive, cohesive, inviting environment. This *Plan* recommends that all proposed buildings in this gateway area be of high quality and generally contemporary in design, including the following specific recommendations:

- Commercial and multiple family uses should incorporate high-quality, attractive exterior building materials and site design. Light industrial buildings should be built to high quality design standards and be adaptable for a range of uses over time (e.g., possibly future commercial uses).
- Larger buildings should include varied setbacks, building heights, and architectural details to soften their scale. Where larger buildings are proposed far from a street, the development should include smaller buildings in “outlots” closer to the street.
- Pedestrian connections to buildings and surrounding neighborhoods should be provided.
- Garages should not be the predominant architectural features on any street frontage.
- Large parking lots directly abutting streets should be avoided or heavily landscaped.
- The overall public and private landscaping theme should emphasize native plantings, including prairie plantings. Development along or backing up to United States Highway 2 should be attractively landscaped to create a favorable first impression at this gateway. Street trees should be provided in the terrace areas of all streets. Private landscaping should be generous, particularly in street setback areas and in buffer yards.
- Private signage should be controlled to protect and enhance the desired character of this area. Ground signs should be limited to low-profile, monument style signs.
- Commercial, industrial, and multiple-family residential lighting should be carefully controlled, particularly given the mixed use character of this site.

E. Extraterritorial Area

1. Growth Boundaries

Visually distinguishing the edges of a community is a very important tool for protecting community identity and ensuring the wise use of land. Clearly defined community edges create the distinctions between “city and country”. The absence of clearly definable edges is a primary element of many peoples’ understanding of “urban sprawl.” The combination of development breaks, views, open space features, architectural styles, and urban forms that create these edges should be recognized and protected.

Map 6: Planned Land Use – City and Map 7: Planned Land Use – 5-mile Area depicts both inner and outer community edges. Inner community edges are located where urban development begins. Outer community edges help define the boundaries of “Greater Sterling” (i.e. the General Planning Area). Recognition of outer community edges helps to foster a sense of common destiny between the jurisdictions located within the region. This awareness is often an important early step in effective intergovernmental planning efforts. At these outer community edges, lands should ideally be kept in open space uses to foster the sense of anticipation before entering the urban community to advance the objectives of community separation and agricultural preservation.

Regardless of the extent of planned land uses illustrated on a future development map, there is always a limit to the amount and location of development that will be permitted by the community. Throughout this planning process, the public has expressed a concern about “leap-frog” development, the appearance of the community edges, and number of properties within the existing City that are readily available for development or redevelopment. In response, the City has established short-term and long-term development boundaries as a strategy to rectify the identified issues.

The short-term growth boundary is established to address development pressures within ten years of adoption of this Plan. Lands within the short-term growth boundary are intended to be served by municipal services, in particular sanitary sewer and public water. An area for infill rural residential development has been identified. The City must impose a residential density of one dwelling unit per thirty-five acres to stem the tide of rural development to ensure its ability to grow in a logical manner and efficiently provide essential services.

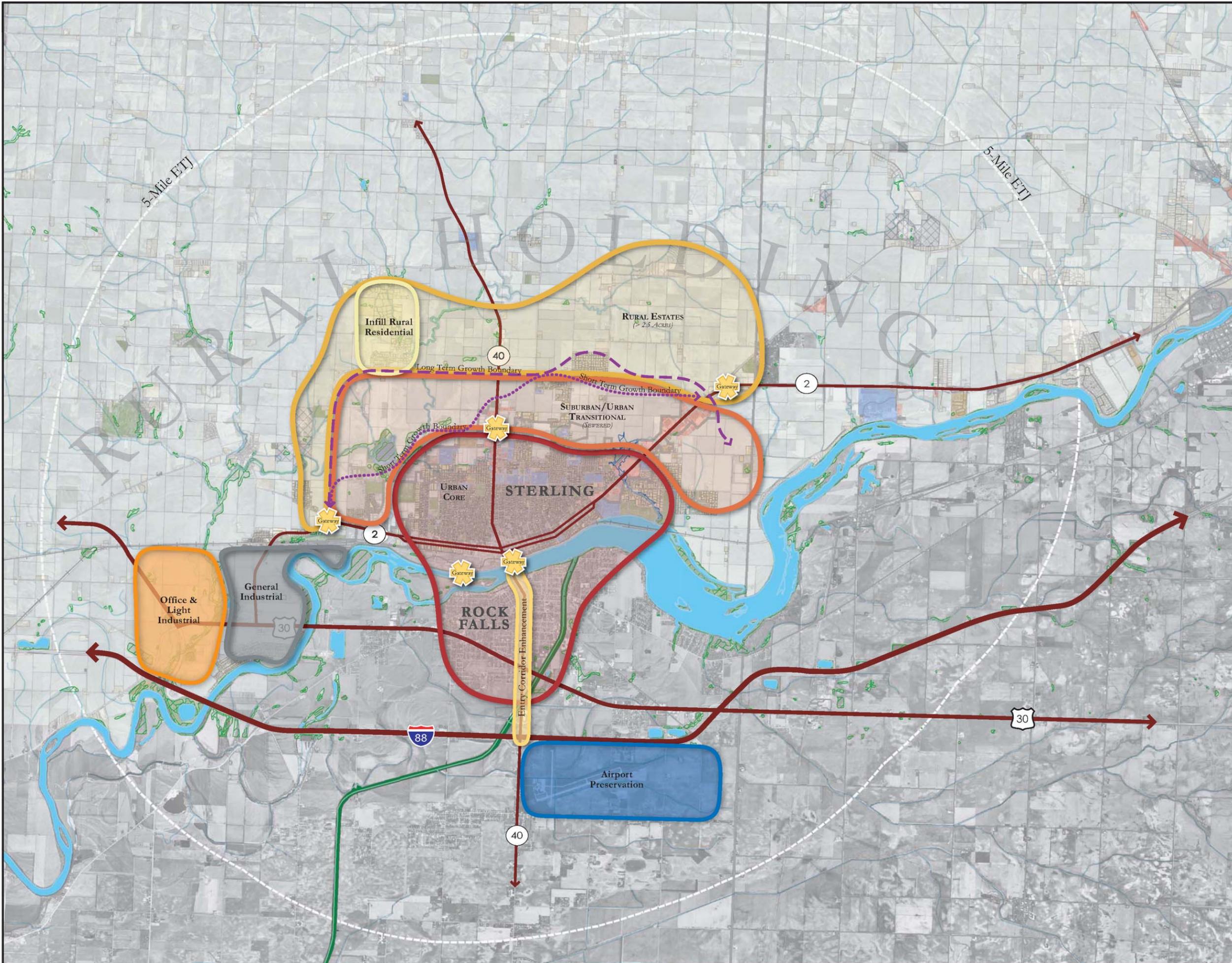
The long-term boundary is intended to preserve land area for future development occurring more than ten years after the adoption of this Plan. It is anticipated that this boundary is the extent the City can expect to grow and provided services to within the 20-year planning period of this document. Again, the lands outside of this boundary have been illustrated to accommodate rural estate residential development (on lots less than 2.5-acres in size). Lands within this boundary will also be held to the density of one dwelling unit per thirty-five acres until such time as the City Plan Commission and City Council amend this Plan or twenty years from the adoption of this Plan has passed.

Planned Land Use - 5-Mile Area

- Corporate Limits
- Corporate Limits
- Parcels
- Railroad
- Floodplains
- Wetlands
- Agricultural and Woodland Preservation Areas
- Single Family Residential - Rural
- Single Family Residential - Sewered
- Two-Family/Townhouse Residential
- Mixed Residential
- Neighborhood Business
- General Commercial
- Downtown
- Office
- General Industrial
- Government and Institutional
- Stormwater Management and Passive Recreation
- Surface Water
- Vacant
- Right-of-Way



Date: December, 2005
Source: City of Sterling, U.S. Census, ISGI 1998-1999.



2. Future Development Density/Character

a. Residential:

Rural land divisions will not cease to arise, even with the implementation of this Plan. Some existing rural subdivisions north of the City—south of Science Ridge Road (between 6th and 16th Avenues) and along Hickory Hills Road—will retain their popularity and continue to experience growth.

The City should encourage that future neighborhoods within these districts be subdivided and built following the principles and techniques of “conservation neighborhood design.”

Conservation neighborhood design breaks from conventional subdivision development in several ways. The following four principles guide “conservation neighborhood design,” and separate it from conventional design:

- Preserve and enhance the environmental systems that define, sustain, and connect neighborhoods.
- Locate housing within walking distance of parks, schools, shops, services and jobs.
- Blend the convenience of the automobile with the creation of safe, comfortable places to walk.
- Include a mix of housing types to accommodate a variety of lifestyles and age groups.

The guiding principles of conservation neighborhood design are achieved through a variety of techniques to be used when neighborhood development plans are prepared and land is subdivided. For example, preserving and enhancing environmental systems requires first obtaining a detailed understanding of environmentally important areas, and then laying out the development with the aim of preserving those areas and integrating them into the neighborhood. Identifying accessible, attractive neighborhood park sites *before* lots are laid out is also critical, rather than designating “leftover lands” as park sites. Finally, the subdivision cannot be viewed in isolation. Instead, adjacent lands must be analyzed to assure that open space connections between neighborhoods can be made.

b. Nonresidential:

Density and character for non-residential development in the City’s extraterritorial area should mimic the requirements expected within the City itself. As many of the large-scale users will likely require municipal services—sanitary sewer and water—the City is provided an opportunity to work with the development to achieve a higher design standard than would be required by the County. Recommended non-residential development standards are found later in this Section.

The lands between the Lincoln Highway and the Rock River, at the intersection with IL 30, are planned for industrial and office lands uses. These areas are appropriate for high-quality indoor manufacturing, assembly, and storage uses with generous landscaping and limited signage. Office uses would appropriate in these areas, of the impact of industrial uses on their operation will be negligible (e.g., noise, emissions, heavy trucking activity). Additionally, logistics, back-office operations, agri-business, and value-added production uses are also appropriate. All development in general industrial districts should comply with detailed site, building, signage, and landscaping design standards as outlined in this Plan.

3. Interchange Development

The I-88 interchanges with IL 40 and IL 30 are the main gateways into the City of Sterling. Unfortunately, these are areas that the City has little decision-making authority in regards to land use and development quality.

The City is, however, well positioned to provide municipal services to the area at the I-88/IL 30 interchange. In fact, the City has already provided such services to industrial development over two miles from the corporate limits. The City should encourage the use of pre-annexation agreements in this area when providing such services to ensure that the development can be held to City standards for design and construction, and to ensure that the development will ultimately become part of the City of Sterling.

The City must also cooperate with Rock Falls to address development type and quality at the I-88/IL 40 interchange. This interchange is the front door to both communities, and the City of Sterling must ensure that the aesthetic presence along the I-40 corridor is conducive to a positive public image. Lesser quality development along the corridor will hinder economic development initiatives underway in Sterling.

4. Airport Development

The City must gain a firm understanding of Whiteside County's and Rock Falls' long-range plans for the Joseph H. Bittorf Field Airport. With its current construction, the facility is able to accommodate corporate jet traffic, but the volume of such traffic it experiences is unknown. The airport is an invaluable public facility and its future growth must be preserved. Maintaining the airport will expand community economic development opportunities by providing an "in-town" air access service to businesses that many other communities do not offer. The City must encourage Rock Falls and Whiteside County to adopt airport protection area policies to provide for the future expansion of the airport and encourage only compatible land use decisions as determined by the governing body or bodies with land use or development jurisdiction for the area in the future.

F. City-Wide

1. Farm and Open Space Preservation

Land use recommendations for lands beyond the "Short-Term Growth Boundary" line but within the City's Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) boundary are found on Map 7. This *Plan* identifies desirable land uses within the City's ETJ area to effectively manage growth in the long term. The map generally illustrates a "ring" of *rural estates* and *rural holding* land uses outside of the long-term growth boundary to the north, east, and west of the City. However, an area for *Office* and *Business Park* development is illustrated along the Lincoln Highway and US 30 near the interchange of I-88.

The *rural estates* areas are intended to allow for limited residential development that is not served by municipal utilities, and provide a transition to the exclusive agricultural areas. Moreover, it will allow for the infill of existing rural residential development in the ETJ. Proposed development in this area will be encouraged to develop in a "clustered" manner to preserve as much of the productive soils and ecological features as possible.

The *rural holding* areas are intended to promote statewide agricultural land use policies; allowing only development that is of a rural or agricultural nature. This translates to densities equal to or less than one non-farm residence per 35 acres. The City should consider employing a policy of not extending urban services into these areas.

With the City's recent extension of sanitary sewer and municipal water to the Wal-Mart Distribution Center, additional large-scale, employment-providing development is likely in the area. These developments will also wish to take advantage of the presence of a rail spur and the confluence of three arterial roadways. The City has the opportunity to raise the bar on development quality by negotiating site design and aesthetics in conjunction with utility extension pre-annexation agreements.

a. Impact on City Character:

Throughout the public participation events, most participants expressed a desire to keep Sterling's "small city" character and identity intact. This character will be difficult to maintain by allowing new development that is physically separated from the rest of the City. Increased separation between jobs and housing would result in more traffic congestion and isolation of those who depend on others to transport them (e.g., children and elderly). This separation, isolation, and related traffic congestion, unless carefully planned or mitigated, would slowly erode Sterling's small-city character. Keeping development compact, scaled to a size compatible with current City characteristics, and planned within distinguishable natural boundaries (like that formed by the Rock River and tributaries, environmental corridors, and parkland), are ways of truly maintaining Sterling's small-city character.

b. Impact on Economic Development:

This *Plan* advises a strong public-private partnership to advance redevelopment of key areas for economic development and community services that are close to where people live. Nonresidential growth at the City's periphery would decrease the viability and marketability of redevelopment in the Downtown and Lincoln Highway areas. New commercial development planned for the City's east side may be difficult to market if that same type of development occurs to the west. Office and light industrial employment uses are planned for the lands adjacent to the I-88/Highway 30 interchange over the next 10 to 20 years. Competing industrial/business parks in Rock Falls may have a slight advantage in attracting what may be a relatively thin market. However, the City is positioning itself to attract new economy employment opportunities, and must "hold out" for development timing to be ripe. Within the foreseeable future, if this west area is not opened for development, the east side location will likely be far more attractive to large-scale retail development.

c. Impact on Natural Resources:

Non-residential development with large impervious surfaces—such as the most likely uses for this area—may require considerable grading and can have significant environmental impacts on surrounding natural resources, even with progressive stormwater management rules. Further, the presence of intensive development at the edges of these natural areas, unless carefully designed and scaled, can have a negative visual impact.

d. Impact on Traffic:

Traffic is projected to increase on Highway 40, Freeport Road, the Lincoln Highway, and State Trunk Highway (STH) 30, whether the City continues to grow or not. The completion of Lynn Blvd has alleviated traffic pressures on the Lincoln Highway. However, certain types of development in the City's periphery would generate greater impacts on roadways. For example, based on the Institute of Transportation Engineer trip generation standards, every 1,000 square feet of retail space in a specialty retail center generates about 41 car trips per day. A big box retail outlet at 150,000 square feet would generate about 6,150 car trips per day on average. Development in the ETJ will also increase local traffic demand on Exchange Street, which serves as the only other route into the City. The fact that most residential and retail growth is planned for Sterling's east side, and large-scale non-residential development would be on the west side,

would further increase the number and distance of car trips to and from different edges of the community.

e. Impact on Local Intergovernmental Relations:

Any future growth and annexation at the periphery of the City will likely be opposed by the surrounding communities. Moreover, City policies that stem residential growth in the ETJ will undoubtedly strain relations between the communities and make it more difficult to initiate other cooperative ventures.

This *Plan* does acknowledge that there will continue to be pressure to develop the lands surrounding the City, especially along the Lincoln Highway, IL 40, Freeport Road, STH 30, and I-88. The City has identified “receiving areas” to allow for infill rural residential development opportunities. However, as a result of the Illinois Plat Act, the City has a few options to address this development pressure over the planning period:

- Work with the surrounding communities’ non-profit organizations or others to acquire the land for public use, purchase development rights (PDR), or some combination of the two.
- Work with the surrounding Towns and Whiteside County to implement a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system to help local officials make sound decisions about land use. LESA can provide a technical framework to numerically rank land parcels based on local resource evaluation and site considerations. Soils are rated and placed into groups ranging from the best to the least suited for a specific agricultural use, such as cropland, forestland, or rangeland. Then, a relative value is determined for each group. The land evaluation is based on data from the National Cooperative Soil Survey—often called the largest and most valuable natural resource database in the world.
- Work with the property owners, the Towns, and Whiteside County on a mutually acceptable proposal involving both preservation of key lands and development of others. This could be accomplished through the preparation of a multi-jurisdictional Conservation Plan. Limited development could feature low-intensity uses that preserve rural character and the sense of separation between City and countryside. Such a cooperative, detailed planning effort may provide more confidence that City/rural character and environmentally sensitive areas would be preserved. This could lead to the implementation of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program where development “sending” and “receiving” areas are designated.

2. Property Maintenance

The City must encourage residential property maintenance and actively assist homeowners in maintenance and preservation efforts. Several state and federal programs and funding sources are available to assist local governments and residents meet housing objectives. The City should work with county, state, federal, and non-profit agencies to access these programs.

Table 14: Property Maintenance Funding Programs

Funding	Agency	Purpose	Eligible Activities
Economic Development Initiative (EDI)	HUD	Grants to local governments to enhance both the security of loans guaranteed through the Section 108 Loan Program and the feasibility of the economic development and revitalization projects they finance.	Grant funds can only be used in projects also assisted by the Section 108 Loan Program; for property acquisition; rehabilitation of publicly owned property; housing rehabilitation; economic development activities; acquisition, construction, reconstruction, or installation of public facilities, public works and other site improvements.
Community Development Block Grant - Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program	HUD	Provides financing for economic development, housing rehabilitation, public facilities, and large-scale physical development projects	Economic Development activities eligible under CDBG, acquisition of real property, rehabilitation of real property and housing, construction and reconstruction of public services
Community Development Block Grant	HUD	Intended to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities.	Neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and provision of improved community facilities and services.
HOME Investments Partnerships Program	HUD	Create affordable housing for low-income households.	Grants to States and localities to fund activities that build, buy, and/or rehabilitate affordable housing for rent or homeownership, or provide direct rental assistance to low-income households.
Illinois Affordable Housing Trust Fund - (Trust Fund)	IHDA	Affordable housing production for low income and very low income.	Flexible uses, homeowner, rental, special needs, loans or grants (under special conditions), geographic targeting of funds.
Community Development Assistance Program: Housing Rehabilitation	DCEO	Housing rehabilitation for low to moderate income individuals	Economic development, public facilities construction, design engineering, housing rehabilitation, planning, emergency public facilities.

In addition to housing rehabilitation, the City should review and continue to enforce their **property maintenance codes** in an effort to improve residential areas and the overall health and safety of the community. This should continue its city-wide “spring clean-up,” whereby it patrols for abandoned, wrecked, or unregistered vehicles. It is important to note that community code and ordinance enforcement requires significant staff resources to initiate and maintain a strong political will on behalf of the elected officials to enforce. The primary goal behind such actions is not to cause a rift between residents, businesses, and government, but to beautify the overall appearance of the community.

3. Implement a Balanced Residential Development Policy

An increasing number of cities and villages in metropolitan areas have experienced a boom in multi-family development, and this is raising concerns about maintaining the “single-family” character of the community. Furthermore, market trends tend to favor larger-scale projects of 100 or more dwelling units, and building sizes of 24 or more dwelling units per building. While Sterling has not yet felt the full force of these trends, the time is coming. In response, many communities have enacted a Balanced Residential Development Policy to limit the proportion of housing provided in multi-family development to historic or otherwise desirable levels and to disperse multi-family development within the community to avoid over-concentrations in any one neighborhood or “side of town”. To pass constitutional muster, such a policy should not include requirements for minimum lot sizes, housing values or rents, or quotas for owner occupied versus rental housing.

Such a policy for the City would be adopted by a Council Resolution, upon consideration and recommendation from the Planning Commission. It would most likely exempt infill development or redevelopment projects to provide maximum flexibility and incentives. It would apply to all other projects containing residential units. Typically, the policy would state that every new development project, or combination of projects recognized by the City, that contained residential dwelling units (except for infill or redevelopment projects as defined by the City) would need to provide a minimum of 60% single-family units, and a maximum of 15% two- or three-family units, and a maximum of 25% multi-family units. This approach would allow for market flexibility by not requiring a fixed blend. It would also allow projects that are comprised mainly or entirely of multi-family or two-family units to be approved in conjunction with projects that might be fully comprised of single-family detached units.

This approach has also resulted in the dispersion of multi-family and two-family dwellings throughout the community. The requirement to provide blended neighborhoods has also resulted in better neighborhood designs because land use transitions occur within the neighborhood boundaries and under the control of a single developer, rather than only at neighborhood edges. This approach has further resulted in the provision of better quality two-family and multi-family units with more site amenities. Another benefit is that a higher percentage of these two-family and multi-family units are designed for owner occupancy. Finally, the Residential Balance Policy has resulted in higher residential densities, and the *streamlined* approval of multi-family projects, because more care must be put into the design of the subdivision and buildings.

The application of a Balanced Residential Development Policy is implemented through the review of individual subdivision and planned unit development projects. Such a policy is best applied in conjunction with Detailed Neighborhood Development Plans, to help establish a very well-designed and “pre-approved” land use pattern.

Traditional Neighborhood Design

Portions of the community are appropriate for residential development that employs the concepts of “Traditional Neighborhood Design.” Design elements commonly found in traditional neighborhoods include:

- Reduced building setbacks that create a distinct sense of place and charming human scale by bringing buildings close to the sidewalk and street;
- Use of picket fences, wrought iron fences, masonry walls, or hedgerows to define the outdoor space between the home and street and to create human scale spaces;
- Use of front porches and stoops to encourage social interaction between neighborhood residents and to create visual interest in building facades;
- Pulling back garages behind the front facade of the home as much as possible or placing the garage in the rear yard of the home with access from an alley, lane or parking court;
- Use of public plazas, greens and squares to provide focal points for the neighborhood, create visual interest, and generate highly prominent building sites.

Many communities have enacted ordinances to guide this type of development, using models typically developed by a university extension.

4. Gateway Identification and Enhancements

Entryways, or gateways as they are sometimes called, are the first impression a community makes on visitors and residents alike. The entryway and related features go beyond marking the edge of the community; but also acts as the “front door” to the community, setting a tone for the community and its interior neighborhoods. A community is provided with an ever-present opportunity to make a favorable impression on visitors, and help to establish and reinforce the community’s character and sense of place.

Entryways into Sterling are unique and highly valuable assets. This *Plan* seeks to preserve these entryways, and establish a complimentary “sense of entry” in carefully-defined areas along the expanding edges of the City. This *Plan* also seeks to protect and enhance these unique aesthetic qualities through the use of zoning standards requiring high-quality landscaping, building design, signage, lighting and public furnishings.

a. Community Entryways

The community entryways into Sterling are its visual “front doors”, and wherever possible, should be protected and enhanced. High quality public entry signs and/or public art may be used to formally announce entry. These entrances include:



Existing IL Route 2

IL Route 2 (Lincoln Highway) is the most important entryway into Sterling from the east and west. Existing strip commercial developments line both sides of the roadway, defining much of entryway experience. Development along this roadway is subject to the City for review and approval. There is no comprehensive standard for development types and intensities. The City should address *how* these entryways should look and relate to the larger community, how private development should be designed, and how individual projects should relate to each other and surrounding parcels to create a visually pleasing, efficient, and lasting development pattern. In recent years, the City has striven to protect and improve the entryway experience through improved building and site design, extensive landscaping, signage and controlled access for commercial development. The restriction of future billboard development along this corridor is also paramount in preserving the character and appearance of this entryway.

The City has also received grant funding from the Illinois State Beautification Initiative to plant wildflowers in the median at the entry to the community. The Wildflowers of Illinois program is intended to improve the quality of life in the state, enhance tourism, restore Illinois’ ecological identity, and to make the state a more attractive place to live.

IL 40

The role of IL 40 is integral to the City as a transport route. On the south end, the impression of Sterling is articulated by development in Rock Falls. IL 40 is extensively developed from I-88 to the Rock River. The entry to Sterling is lost by the presence of development in Rock Falls, and vice-versa. Development here is also of lower quality, and should be improved. Sterling and Rock Falls need to cooperate to create a definitive edge to distinguish between the two communities. While the Rock River creates a well-articulated boundary between the communities, a lasting impression of the entry experience has already been established. On the north, travelers are treated to a well-defined edge from “county” to “city.” However, the aesthetics of the development at this edge should be improved. Again, the City should strive to

protect and improve the entryway experience through improved building and site design, extensive landscaping, signage and controlled access for commercial development.

Sterling has a number of other gateways, primarily lesser-used roads (based upon recorded volumes) like Freeport Road, Avenue G/12th Avenue, and 6th Avenue. These secondary entryways into Sterling are more subtle, and are generally experienced by local residents. However, as traffic increases on primary entryways, the City will likely observe increasing travel along these routes as well. Along these routes, quality of development and maintenance issues are of foremost importance. The use of formal entry markers such as signs should be very low key. Specifically:



Freeport Road

This roadway is emerging as a significant connector to communities to the north. Sterling has begun expanding along this roadway as the area is readily served by utilities. It is doubtful that this corridor will emerge as a primary entryway; however, it will remain a consistently traveled corridor due to the ease in traveling to/from Freeport via this roadway. The City must be certain to curtail “leap-frog” development along this roadway, and grow in a pattern consistent to the existing residential development. The City will need to begin restricting driveway access to Freeport Road, and begin planning for anticipated retail development at certain crossroads, such as Lynn Blvd. and Science Ridge Road.

Avenue G/12th Avenue

Again, the Rock River defines the border between the City and Rock Falls. Both communities should cooperate to determine and articulate a vision for road signage and streetscaping along the corridor. Moreover, both communities should develop and implement mutual and consistent development guidelines. In the short-term, Avenue G/12th Avenue will serve as a secondary entryway to the community; however, long-term traffic volumes on the 1st Avenue Bridge could lead to this only other river crossing experiencing increasing use. Development along this corridor will be primarily commercial and industrial in nature. Careful site planning should be encouraged to ensure high-quality, long-term aesthetics.

6th Avenue

As the City grows to the north, 6th Avenue will emerge as a more important secondary gateway. Development in this area will primarily be residential. Special care should be taken by the City to ensure that development edges are established to provide specific community entry locations.

b. Neighborhood Identification

Sterling has a number of neighborhoods that are struggling to maintain their separate identities. In an effort to assist these areas, the City should encourage/promote communication with neighborhood associations. In some cases the City may need to initiate the formation of the neighborhood associations. By engaging various neighborhood groups in consistent and meaningful dialogue, the City will be in a better position to partner with the neighborhoods in establishing the extents of the neighborhoods and demarcate where physical identifying features (signage, furnishings, streetscaping, etc.) could be located. It is important to understand that design and construction of any entry features would in all likelihood necessitate the involvement of community service groups or donation of time, materials, or expertise of neighborhood residents.

5. Adopt Stronger Standards for Non-Residential Development

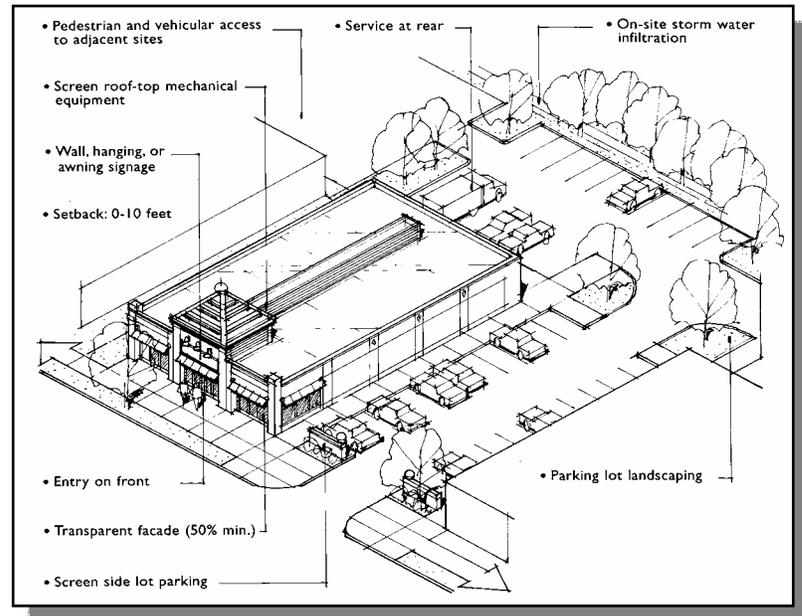
This *Plan* recommends that the City strengthen and enforce design standards for non-residential development projects to ensure high-quality, lasting projects that are compatible with the City's desired character. This recommendation will be a critical strategy for attaining both the City's economic development strategies, and its community character objectives. These standards should apply to all new development and redevelopment in the City. Within these areas, likely to be dominated by both medium- and large-scale buildings, conventional "best practices" design standards are applicable. All of these new standards should be incorporated into the zoning regulations, and strictly adhered to during site plan review and/or land division processes.

a. Desired Commercial Project Layout

For new and expanded commercial uses, the standards listed below and illustrated in the graphic are advised:

- New driveways with adequate throat depths to allow for proper vehicle stacking.
- Limited number of access drives along arterial and collector streets.
- Common driveways serving more than one commercial use, wherever possible.
- High quality landscaping treatment of buffer yards, street frontages, paved areas and building foundations.
- Street trees along all public street frontages.
- Intensive activity areas such as building entrances, service and loading areas, parking lots, and trash receptacle storage areas oriented away from less intensive land uses.
- Parking lots heavily landscaped with perimeter landscaping and/or landscaped islands, along with screening to block views from streets and residential uses.
- Parking to the sides and rear of buildings, rather than having all parking in the front.
- Signage that is high quality and not excessive in height or total square footage.
- Location of loading docks, dumpsters, mechanical equipment, and outdoor storage areas behind buildings and away from less intensive land uses.
- Complete screening of loading docks, dumpsters, mechanical equipment, and outdoor storage areas through use of landscaping, walls, and architectural features.
- Safe, convenient, and separated pedestrian and bicycle access to the site from the parking areas to the buildings, and to adjacent commercial developments.
- Site design features that allow pedestrians to walk parallel to moving cars.
- Illumination from lighting kept on site through use of cut-off luminaires.
- High quality building materials, such as brick, wood, stone, and tinted masonry.

- Canopies, awnings, trellises, bays, and windows to add visual interest to facades.
- Variations in building height and roof lines, including parapets, multi-planed, and pitched roofs and staggered building facades (variations in wall depth and/or direction).
- All building façades containing architectural details and of similar quality as the front building façade.
- Central features that add to community character, such as patios and benches.



b. Desired Industrial Project Layout

For new and expanded industrial uses, the standards listed below and illustrated are advised:

- New driveways with adequate throat depths to allow for proper vehicle stacking.
- Limited number of access drives along arterial and collector streets.
- High quality landscaping treatment of buffer yards, street frontages, paved areas and building foundations.
- Screening where industrial uses abut non-industrial uses, in the form of hedges, evergreen trees, berms, decorative fences or a combination.
- Screening of parking lots from public rights-of-way and non-industrial uses.
- Complete screening of all loading areas, outdoor storage areas, mechanical equipment, and dumpsters using berms, hedges, or decorative walls or fences.
- Street trees along all public road frontages.
- High quality building materials, such as brick, wood, stone, tinted masonry, pre-cast concrete, and architectural metal.
- Location of loading areas at the rear of buildings.
- Separation of pedestrian walkways from vehicular traffic and loading areas.
- Design of parking and circulation areas so that vehicles are able to move from one area of the site to another without re-entering a street.
- Variable building setbacks and vegetation in strategic locations along foundations.

6. Recreational Opportunities and Connections

This Plan recommends preserving “greenway” corridor lands which are most environmentally sensitive and critical for achieving other community goals (e.g., neighborhood connections, stormwater management, etc.). Preservation of the proposed greenway system could be accomplished through the voluntary sale of property by private landowners, or easements at the time of land development.

Conservation priority areas that fall within the proposed greenway system should be regarded as having ecological significance when land purchase or development is being considered. The primary benefits of striving towards a greenway system instead of piecemeal conservation are many. A greenway system will support many different activities and serve multiple purposes, such as:

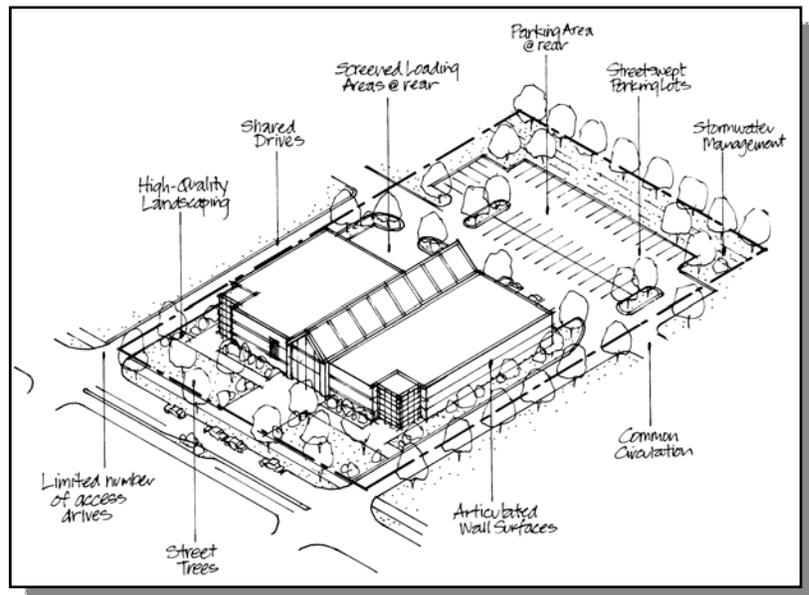
- **Active and passive recreation:** Most of the City’s major parks and parkways should be included in and linked by the greenway system. Linkages should be accomplished, in part, through City and property owner cooperation on a bike and pedestrian trail system. Where off-road trail linkages are not feasible, the system could be tied together along public right-of-ways.
- **Neighborhood amenities and connections:** The greenway system provides amenities within neighborhoods that increase property values and quality of life, allows neighborhoods to connect to one another and key points in the City, and provides attractive neighborhood edges. Neighborhood connections to the greenway system should be a primary consideration in subdivision design.

- **Natural stormwater management:** A majority of the lands in the greenway system are floodplain and/or wetland, which provide necessary flood storage capacity during storm events. Making use of natural systems for stormwater management is an environmentally-responsible and cost-effective way to deal with stormwater issues.

- **Resource preservation and restoration:** The greenway system is home to varied plant and animal species, which contribute to the quality of life for human residents. Over

the years, and often for legitimate reasons (e.g., farming), creeks have been degraded and wetlands drained. As the community transitions away from most types of farming, there are tremendous opportunities to restore degraded creeks and wetlands to natural conditions. By linking the different pieces of ecologically significant lands and various types of wildlife habitat the general wildlife population will be able to expand due to the larger and more diverse habitat patches.

- **Farming:** Farming can remain a legitimate open space use within the greenway system, particularly in areas where sensitive natural features are not present. The agricultural portions of the City of Sterling contribute much to the City’s charm, and should be preserved. To ensure farming remains a viable economic activity for some local residents, Sterling should promote



fruit and vegetable farms and greenhouses, designed to supply food to farmers markets, specialty grocery stores, and restaurants in Whiteside County.

The permanent preservation of a greenway system can be a defining element of Sterling and a complement to the extensive active recreation lands around the community. Open space and farmlands are what brought many residents to Sterling initially. Ironically, in many communities, this attraction ultimately results in the destruction of its amenities.

7. Community Character Plan

For a community like Sterling, a variety of elements contribute to the creation of community character. These elements should be considered with all development proposals and government actions associated with implementation of this Plan. The City has some measure of control of nearly all of these elements through zoning, subdivision, and building regulations and public investments. Based on these community character elements and an analysis of the specific strengths and opportunities for Sterling, a Community Opportunity Plan is then presented through a map and accompanying text description (see Map 8: Opportunity Areas).

a. Overview of “Community Character” Planning.

Growth in Sterling has been accommodated with a blend of development that is decidedly mixed in terms of its quality and appropriateness. This pattern of “good” and “bad” development has affected the overall image and character of the City. This uneven track record has resulted from development standards and procedures that simply do not ensure that new development will reflect the desired *character* of the community. Specifically, critical aesthetic components of development (such as architecture, open space connections, or the preservation of community entry experiences, pedestrian amenities, and the like) are often not addressed.

Many communities have begun to realize this shortcoming, and adopted standards and processes that attempt to achieve desired development character. Detailed site plan and building design review are two commonly used techniques. Required landscaping and signage standards limitations are other commonly used aesthetic techniques. In addition, many older communities are now making concerted efforts to guide re-investment into “worn-out” areas and to preserve historic resources. This Plan recommends that the City of Sterling pursue all of these techniques and approaches.

Still, these measures cannot ensure a community will retain its identity, older neighborhoods will remain attractive to new residents, new neighborhoods will contribute to community character, or an aging commercial area will compete successfully with newer developments. In recognition of these more complicated challenges, progressive planning involves proactive interventions toward protecting, enhancing, and creating the desired character of community development.

Historically, growth in Sterling occurred in a relatively compact form centered on the historic Downtown. While undergoing some changes over the years, the Downtown area retains many of the charms of historic downtowns of the late-1800s/early-1900s. This character is reflected in the commercial buildings along the Lincoln Highway and Locust Street, several historic local landmarks, and the grid street plan. New development and redevelopment in these areas must reflect this character.

The development of large highways through the area in the 1950s through 1970s promoted and responded to a different development form. The more recently established pattern on the fringes of the community is more auto-oriented and suburban in character. It includes larger lots, single story buildings, large parking lots, and less emphasis on pedestrian connectivity. Although the automobile will continue to be the dominant form of transportation for the foreseeable future, the City should promote consideration for bicycle and pedestrian friendliness, better designed and interconnected neighborhoods, and a variety of housing opportunities.

Architectural styles provide a challenge in a growing community. In places where it is possible to identify a dominant architectural style (such as in the downtown), infill development should be complementary. Where a wider variety of styles exist, common architectural themes or elements (such as materials, colors, roof pitches or stylistic appurtenances) should be reflected. In peripheral locations, styles should be evaluated based on probable long-term merit, rather than on short-term trends, and quality of materials should be stressed. Also, the value and desirability of standard “corporate architecture” should be constantly evaluated and challenged with new development proposals. Detailed visual guidelines should be prepared and followed for different parts of the City.

The use of public furnishings (such as benches or planters) conveys a sense of public investment and pride in a community that cannot be replicated through other means. Particularly in areas with many visitors, such investments complement the variety of goods and services offered and create a festive or civilized character that encourages repeat visits. In recent years the City of Sterling has begun extensive streetscape improvements in the Downtown to resounding public approval. Public furnishings should be continued throughout the Downtown and in parks or other key spots in the community. These furnishings should be of high aesthetic quality and proven durability.

Views are the most difficult aspect of community character to address. The protection of important views is particularly challenging because the desire of the private developer or landowner to capture and protect the view often requires visual barriers which block other’s public views. It is impossible for a community to protect all views. However, in a community like Sterling, certain views are essential defining elements of a neighborhood, entry experience, or the community as a whole. These critical views should be protected through view mapping, public acquisition in fee or easement, and/or responsive site design techniques. The importance of mapping cannot be underemphasized, as many important views are lost through ignorance as are lost consciously. Views are particularly important along riverfront areas, and in the areas with hills and valleys. The Rock River corridor and much of the southern growth area of the City exhibits these qualities; however, the public is essentially cut-off from the view or the natural feature.

8. Community Opportunity Plan Map

Map 8: Opportunity Areas (in combination with Map: 5: Neighborhood Planning Area) illustrates and describes different “planning districts” within the community, and the connections between those districts. Each district is an area that should have its own particular character, mix of land uses, and sense of place as the City grows. In certain districts, these characteristics are already present; in others, the community will have to make concerted efforts over the next 25 years to realize the full potential of these districts. While some planning districts represent a specific, clearly defined place (e.g., Four Corners Commercial Area), others represent several places or corridors with similar characteristics (e.g., Mansion Row Historic District, “The Strand”). Connections among the districts are established primarily through open space, roadway corridors, and a thoughtfully planned transition between different land uses.

A



Riverworks Center

- Ongoing Steel Production
- Light Industry
- Bio-processing
- Back Office "Teleport"

Expanded Medical Campus and Supporting Retail & Services

- Senior Center
- Day Care
- Extended Stay
- Clinics
- Pharmacy
- Senior Housing

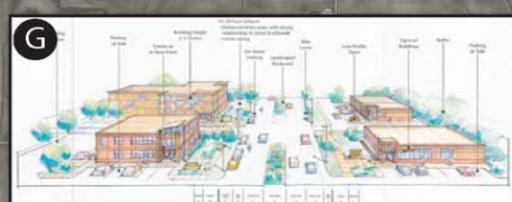
C



Downtown West

- Downtown River Connection
- Expanded Farmer's Market
- Public Focal Point

G



Commercial Corridor Infill and Beautification

D



Downtown East

- Preservation
- Restoration

West End Commercial Mixed Use Center

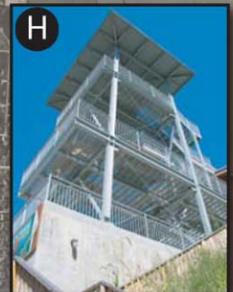
- Supports Westwood Sports Center
- Motel
- Restaurants
- Bike Shop
- Sporting Goods
- Quality Apartments

Westwood Sports Center

Four Corners Commercial Area

- Flower/Card Shop
- Coffee Shop
- Gift Shop
- Candy Store

H



Extended Viewing Platform

Mansion Row Historic District

Lincoln Highway Hennepin Canal Interpretive Exhibit and Trailhead

Marina Village

- Condos
- Golf Course Community

B



Business & Technology Park

- Golf Course

"The Strand"

- Artisan Guild
- Cultural/Public Spaces
- Riverwalk
- Dockminiums
- Sports-related Retail
- Union Pacific Transportation History Center and Retail Store
- Hotel/Waterpark

Downtown Sterling

Lincoln Highway Hennepin Canal Interpretive Exhibit and Trailhead

F



Pedestrian Bridge

E



Marsupial Bridge

 Wayfinding Markers
  Monumentation
 Historic Buildings
  Historic District
 Targeted Neighborhood Reinvestment Areas

Created: August 9, 2005
Vandewalle & Associates © 2005

G. Transportation Plan

1. Reasons for the Transportation Plan

This transportation plan element of the Comprehensive Plan will facilitate the implementation of safe and efficient movement by:

- Supporting appropriate improvements to the existing roadway network,
- Recommending the location of future arterial and collector roads,
- Proposing a conceptual plan for a bikeway network in and around the City,
- Suggesting a policy for developing and maintaining the City’s sidewalk system,
- Guiding land development into locations and arrangements which promote walking, biking, and shorter car trips.

Under State Statutes, municipalities can prepare Official Maps to reserve the rights-of-way of future streets, pedestrian/bicycle paths, schools, parks, drainageways and other public facilities—both within the municipal limits and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. The City should prepare an Official Map to mark future roadway corridors, prevent land development in delineated roadway corridors, and obtain sufficient rights-of-way for roads when they are needed at no cost to the local taxpayers.

It is important to remember that actual construction or expansion of any road may not occur for many years, even after new or additional right-of-way is acquired. However, the City should work to acquire corridors, through dedication or purchase of additional right-of-way width, well in advance of actual need. Recommended transportation improvements are shown in Map 8: Opportunity Areas and described below. Alignments of future roads will be subject to later refinement.

2. Major Arterial Roads and Highways

Highways 2, 40, and 30 through and near Sterling are the community’s major arterial roads. Highways 2 and 40 may have to be widened in the future, especially if the City experiences increased development over the planning period. The current alignment of Highway 2 is disruptive to the Downtown and economic development efforts. It also results in traffic congestion and an unsafe pedestrian environment. The City and State can expect traffic volumes to continue to increase along this highway. The City should cooperate with the Illinois Department of Transportation to analyze the lifespan of the Lincoln Highway in its current configuration.

3. Minor Arterial and Collector Roads

The existing system of minor arterial and primary collector roads includes Freeport Road, Lynn Blvd, LeFevre Road, 6th Avenue, Science Ridge Road, McCue Road, 16th Avenue, 16th Street, 3rd Street, and 4th Street. In general, rights-of-way for collector streets should be 80 feet in width.

As the City expands, Science Ridge Road should connect to the Lincoln Highway and ultimately to Stouffer Road to provide a complete, interconnected roadway network (see Map 8). As most future development within Sterling is anticipated on the north side of the community, the recent completion of Lynn Boulevard should be sufficient to accommodate projected traffic increases. All collector roads should include sidewalks and street trees on both sides.

4. Local Roads

New local roads needed to serve development are not illustrated, except where they provide key connections to arterial and collector roads. Local roads should be shown on detailed neighborhood development plans and subdivision plats as new neighborhoods develop.

Local street connections should be timed so that they do not serve as collector or arterial streets by default until the actual collector or arterial road is constructed. Subdivisions and other developments should be interconnected, by local roads. Spreading traffic among several roads allows for the most efficient use of transportation dollars and minimizes traffic congestion on a few main roads. An interconnected system is also preferred for police and fire access, street maintenance, and snow plowing.

Sidewalks should be constructed on at least one side of all local roads, and on both sides of local roads which provide key routes to schools, parks, and other community facilities. The City should also ensure the planting of street trees with the approval of new subdivision plats.

5. New Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

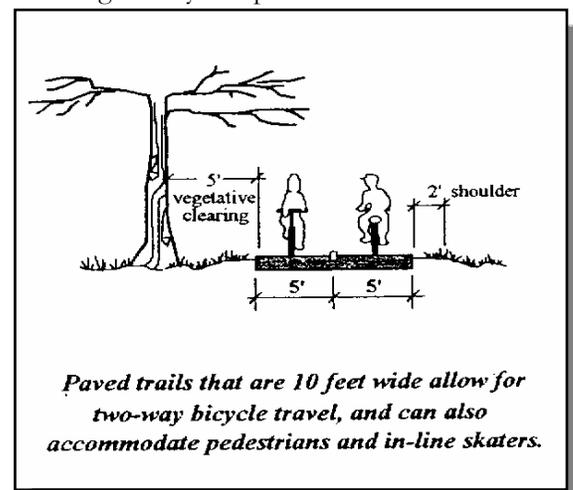
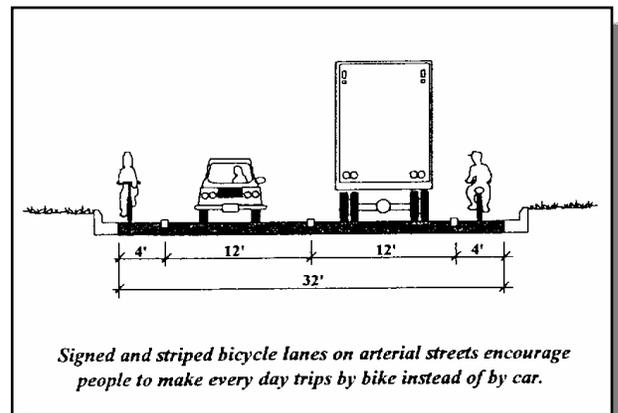
Walking and biking are real transportation alternatives for communities of Sterling's size. Key job centers, shopping districts, parks, and schools are generally accessible to all residential areas. Further, there are increased levels of state and federal financial assistance to communities interested in developing bicycle and pedestrian networks.

The City should develop a sidewalk plan and policy which should (a) show all existing roads without sidewalks where sidewalks should be constructed with road reconstruction or new development and (b) provide a policy for construction of sidewalks along newly platted roads. When it completes such a plan and policy, the City should then update its subdivision ordinance to include that policy as a development standard for all new subdivisions. This Comprehensive Plan recommends sidewalks on:

- Both sides of all arterial and collector streets.
- Both sides of key routes to schools, parks, and other community facilities with heavy foot traffic.
- At least one side of all other local streets. (It is generally preferable to include them on both sides of streets).

The City should also develop a comprehensive bikeway system, which connects to the regional system being advanced at the County and State levels. In general, all new streets should be planned and developed with the expectation that they will be used to a certain extent by bicycles. When traffic volumes and vehicular speeds are low, on-road bike traffic is generally acceptable without extra street width or designated bike lanes. When volumes are higher, signed and striped bicycle lanes (4 to 5 feet wide) or off-street paths are the preferred option. Off-street bike paths are often preferred where recreational traffic is heavy, and where multiple uses (walking, skating) are anticipated or encouraged. Off-street paths are generally 10 feet in width, and should generally be constructed within a minimum 15-foot wide easement or within the public right-of-way.

The bikeway plan should feature a system that connects the Downtown area and surrounding parks and community facilities with outlying neighborhoods and shopping areas. The Plan



should anticipate connections to regional trails and destination points. This Plan recommends off-street paths along riverfronts and existing and abandoned rail rights-of-way. Finally, a pathway river crossing along the Upper Dam to connect to Rock Falls and the Hennepin Canal Trail are suggested.

6. Public Transportation

The number of elderly people in the City will continue to rise in the future. It will be important to provide alternative transportation for elderly people and others who are not able to drive due to physical disability. The City should support county and regional transit alternatives including passenger and excursion rail, even though they seem unlikely at the present time.

H. Economic Development

1. Economic Context

a. The Setting

The City of Sterling is located in strategic location in a region rich in history, natural beauty, and economic assets. Perched on the northern banks of the Rock River in northwestern Illinois, it is surrounded by a constellation of urban centers in three states, and is situated amidst one of the most striking natural landscapes in the state. The City offers a quintessentially small town environment but with the business advantages, resources, and amenities of a much larger place. It is a business friendly City with a rich tradition of entrepreneurship, innovation, and corporate leadership embodied in such companies as the former Northwestern Wire and Steel Company—one of the first and longest operating steel recycling companies in the entire U.S., and one of the City’s most enduring benefactors—and the Wahl Clipper Corporation.

Cultivating the “New Uses” Economy

While traditional manufacturing in the U.S. remains on the decline, new production-oriented processes using new materials grown or produced domestically are showing great promise. Many of these processes—many of which will involve bio-processing and the introduction of modified agricultural products in the place of synthetics. They will place strategically located, “farm-to-market” communities like Sterling in a superior position provided that they work with area universities and research institutions as well as state and federal economic development agencies to equip themselves for these emerging sectors.

Wired for the Future

Providing support functions for an increasingly information-driven economy, logistics, and value added production are other economic sectors that Sterling is in a good position to take advantage of given its location, existing infrastructure, and available land. The large footprint of these facilities makes it important that they be carefully planned and designed.

High-Powered Business Climate

Many modern manufacturing and data storage and transmission processes use tremendous amounts of electricity placing greater importance on highly reliable and conditioned energy supplies. The City and region feature redundant and affordable energy providing a measure of security against expensive price peaks and power outages.

b. The Asset Base

Major Transportation Infrastructure: Interstates I-88 and I-39 form the intersection of Illinois’ main technology and transshipment corridors. Several other state and county trunk highways as well as major long haul rail lines also transverse the area. This infrastructure has

positioned Global III in nearby Rochelle to be the nucleus of a major logistics hub for the northwestern part of the state.

The Rock River: This spectacular natural amenity is a major quality of life feature that should be used to stimulate increased tourism and recreation-based economic development.

Regional Medical Center: Community General Hospital is the flagship medical treatment facility for the Whiteside/Lee County region and draws patients from surrounding communities. Its economic impact should be broadened through expanded medical programs and ancillary services.

Quality Affordable Housing: Sterling offers an attractive supply of well maintained older housing, much of it in historic neighborhood settings. This can serve as a strong attractor to the new generation of entrepreneurs and telecommuters (as well as retirees) who prefer an authentic city-in-the-country lifestyle to conventional sub-urbanism.

Historic Attractions: Among Sterling's historic attractions are the Lincoln Highway (the first transcontinental highway in the Nation), and the Hennepin Canal (a national historic landmark). Other historic assets include a surviving Carnegie Library, a City Auditorium, and the City's various connections to the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. Other nearby attractions include Tampico and Dixon with their connections to Ronald Reagan, and Grand Detour the home of John Deere.

A New Economic Era

Located at the extreme western edge of the expanding Metro Chicago area, the City of Sterling has historically served a vital function as a supplier of agricultural and semi-finished materials to the Chicago region and other industrial cities of the Upper Midwest. As the economy of the region has begun to adapt to a post industrial era, Sterling's economy must also adapt, diversify and complement the region's emerging economic sectors. As in the past, the City's future economic role will be tied strongly to the larger economic region based in Metro Chicago. Rethinking the City's economy however must be done in the context of the global economic and social trends facing not just the region, but the entire nation. These trends include:

- An increasingly global economy with information and goods trans-shipped over extended distances.
- A growing market in domestic, heritage tourism in the wake of September 11th.
- Faster waves of new technology commercialization and the spreading out of centers of innovation.
- The rise of "just-in-time" production placing supreme importance on centralized transportation and distribution networks.
- The opening of new markets and applications for the nation's agricultural sector resulting in innovative new uses for agricultural products and by-products.
- The emergence of the "bio-economy" and specialized centers of research and technology that build off of regional specializations and indigenous resources
- The increasing lack of quality affordable housing and available land in central cities which is driving traditional manufacturing into the hinterland.
- The rise of the Knowledge Economy and its dependence on tailored educational programs, fast reliable data transmission networks, and amenity rich worker environments.
- The impending retirement of the Baby Boomer generation many of whom are seeking to resettle close to their home communities with adequate health care, affordable housing, and recreational amenities close at hand.
- A heightened sensitivity to energy, and food security issues resulting in a growing urgency to shorten the distance between production and consumption.
- The restructuring of the retail sector with a handful of mega players dominating and dislocating large segments of the market.
- The continuing decline of traditional U.S. manufacturing.

Abundant Energy: The closing of Northwest Wire & Steel has freed up a great deal of excess power capacity from the nuclear power facility in Cordova. This highly reliable power source is very attractive to energy intensive industries as well as those that demand a high degree of power reliability. This power supply should be supplemented by other sources such as wind, solar, ethanol, and bio-mass to form an integrated and distributed power security zone for the northwest region.

Fiber-Optic: Major transcontinental data transmission lines transverse the City. Combined with the available power supply, these facilities can attract large-scale “back office” operations such as server farms, major telecommunications facilities, and call centers.

Major Recreational Facilities: The Rock River along with regional trail system and several nearby state parks makes Sterling a recreational mecca for the region. These facilities are supplemented by major public indoor sports facilities at Westwood.

Available Land: There is ample, affordable land in the City and surrounding area with available City services.

Involved Civic Leadership: Sterling is fortunate to be endowed with a small but committed cadre of civic leaders and philanthropists.

Proximity: Sterling is within easy reach of several Metropolitan areas including Chicago, Rockford and the Quad Cities.

Quality Schools: Sterling’s schools have historically enjoyed a solid reputation. Several quality higher education institutions also exist in the region including Northern Illinois University (NIU).

Arts Academy: This institution serves as an arts incubator and “salon” for area artists and patrons. Its expanded presence in the community can be used to reinvigorate Downtown and expand tourism.

2. Major Opportunity Sectors

a. Leisure, Recreation & Tourism

Active Lifestyle Community

Sterling’s complement of medical services, recreation, housing affordability, natural beauty and access to big city amenities makes it an attractive location for active retirees and the semi-retired seeking a different pace and quality of life. More upper market housing geared toward active leisure lifestyles (condos, dockaminiums, golf course communities) and a more vibrant Downtown and cultural and arts scene would further strengthen Sterling’s position in this market. The City should partner with surrounding communities on programs to:

- Diversify housing options
- Partner with developers
- Support the Arts Academy
- Expand medical services
- Energize Downtown
- Open up the Downtown riverfront
- Improve mobility
- Connect regional trail systems

Sports & Recreation

The Sterling – Rock Falls area has a multitude of recreation assets ranging from Westwood Sports Complex, to regional trails, to the Rock River. Perhaps the most important of these is Westwood which is uniquely equipped to host a wide variety of active, indoor sports including soccer, basketball, and volleyball. These facilities have hosted Gus Macker tournaments and NCAA training camps. These facilities should be marketed to a larger client base and aggressively programmed for other special events such as: Olympic training, Junior or Special Olympics, gymnastic exhibitions, and professional and college sports training camps.

The City should further build its sports identity by hosting special outdoor sporting events that showcase major amenities such as the Rock River and the regional trail systems. Such events could include: Iron Man contests, triathlons, Little League and Pop Warner regional tournaments, indoor soccer tournaments, and gymnastics training. Other ideas include: hot air balloon festivals, a Rock River regatta, paddle & portage races, and the construction of a kayak sluice in the Rock River. Projects such as this will help build the region's identity as a destination sports attraction. Initiatives should seek to:

- Connect/expand regional trail network
- Host special recreation events
- Market Westwood Sports Complex
- Build sports-medicine niche
- Recruit more hotels and restaurants

Heritage Tourism

Its location at the intersection of the Hennepin Canal and the historic Lincoln Highway; and its proximity to major historic attractions in Grand Detour, Dixon and Tampico, makes Sterling well positioned to become a stronger player in regional tourism. The City should work with neighboring communities along with State tourism and transportation officials to designate a President's Tri-way that would connect Dixon/Tampico to Galena via the Lincoln Highway and Great River Road. This circuit would also connect several of the region's major outdoor recreation attractions. The City should work to:

- Activate Downtown
- Build a riverfront "strand" and riverwalk
- Celebrate the Lincoln Highway
- Link the Hennepin Canal and Lincoln Highway
- Expand interpretive exhibits and wayfinding
- Preserve and protect historic assets
- Build local-specialty retail sector and arts scene
- Seek funding for a Transportation History Center and/or Steel History Museum
- Seek funding for an Illinois' Presidents Monument
- Enlist Union Pacific Railroad to build a retail store

Transportation History Center

This center could be conceived as an interpretive museum highlighting the various epochs and modes of overland transcontinental travel in the U.S. many of which are already on display in Sterling. It could tell the stories of:

- Lewis & Clark
- The Stage Coach and the western pioneers
- The Iron Horse and the first transcontinental railroads
- The building of the great canals (Erie, Cal-Sag, Hennepin, Suez)
- The Lincoln Highway and the early Automobile Era
- The pre Interstate years and Route 66
- The history of the Interstate Highway system
- The modern era of global trade and containerization
- Historical exhibits of important people and events in the nation's transportation and industrial history: Andrew Carnegie, JD Rockefeller, The Teamsters, NAFTA etc.
- The future: high-speed rail, hydrogen fuels, and beyond

The center could contain historical exhibits, simulators, transportation artifacts, restored trains/automobiles/trucks, model train exhibits, historic maps, and interactive exhibits on transportation technologies such as magnetic levitation (Mag-Lev). The center could also have a Union Pacific retail store.

Illinois Presidents Monument/Museum

This monument/museum could showcase the life and times of the three Illinois presidents represented in the region: Lincoln, Grant, and Reagan. It should be located near the Lincoln Highway in Downtown Sterling.

b. Materials and Information Processing

Agribusiness and Bio-Processing

As the world enters the Bio-Age, new advances in energy production, medical treatments, manufacturing, and food production from “grown” commodities are showing great promise. Cities like Sterling that historically have had strong agricultural economies have new opportunities to retool these economies to new agricultural products and processes.

Sterling's heavy power and transportation infrastructure along with its close proximity to highly productive farms, agriculture research institutions, and the major markets of Chicago, make it a prime location for high volume bio-processing and value-added agriculture. Realizing this opportunity however will require a highly entrepreneurial posture on the part of area economic development officials to unite the necessary partners and financial resources to bring it to life. Government agencies, property owners, agricultural interests, venture capitalists, and agriculture-research institutions must be engaged and grant funding sought.

Creating this sector will require area farmers to rethink their market orientation – perhaps venturing into organic production processes and experimenting with marketable specialty crops that are suitable to local growing conditions. Working with these regional partners, the City should:

- Seek public funding for agribusiness incubator
- Support development of agriculture-processing facilities
- Identify regional partners
- Develop relationships with agricultural research institutions
- Use existing infrastructure

- Scale-up proven agricultural technologies developed elsewhere
- Develop area farmers association

Logistics and Value-Added Production

The region's robust transportation infrastructure and affordable land presents an opportunity to capitalize on the logistics industry that is already well represented in the region. The new Wal-Mart distribution center just outside of Sterling is an example of a potentially much larger distribution sector that could take root in the City. Overdevelopment of this sector can pose some problems in that it is generally land intensive and generates large volumes of truck traffic. Still, expanding this sector should be a part of a balanced and diversified economic development strategy for the City and region.

The large volume of freight that moves through and around the City places Sterling in the "supply chain" of various production-related industries. This presents an opportunity for the off-loading of materials for intermediate or final manufacturing, finishing, or repackaging – a potential that could be under a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) status. Such status allows the tariff-free importation and modification of materials ultimately destined for re-export, and allows manufacturers within the zone to compete more effectively with other countries that have more favorable import duties. The following initiatives should be pursued:

- Reserve sites for modern industrial park uses
- Establish clear design guidelines and use restrictions
- Provide adequate infrastructure
- Avoid placing near main community entryways and scenic areas
- Minimize traffic penetration in central city

Back Office Support

The City's energy and telecommunications infrastructure; its supply of affordable housing; and its proximity to the major labor markets of Chicago, Rockford and the Quad Cities, makes it a viable location for corporate back office functions such as server farms and call centers. The increased off-shoring of these facilities however brings into question their long term sustainability. They should be seen as a potentially important piece – but perhaps not the centerpiece - of a sustainable economic development program.

- Build "last mile" fiber optic connections to designated employment centers
- Shore up primary and secondary education programs
- Improve basic jobs skills training
- Identify locations for modern office park development
- Diversify housing stock

c. "High Craft" Specialty Production

This activity centers around the local production of finished goods and components containing locally grown or tooled materials with high value-added content.

Advanced and Precision Manufacturing

Sterling's abundant energy supplies, along with its heavy infrastructure and history of skilled manufacturing, make it a viable location for the production of technology-assisted production for various industries. This sector is generally less vulnerable to overseas outsourcing than other manufacturing sectors however workers do require higher skill levels and production facilities often need to be highly individualized. The City should help:

- Build Engineers For Tomorrow Program
- Broaden/customize supportive educational programs
- Recruit NIU branch campus

- Extend fiber-optic networks
- Recruit info/energy ‘heavy’ companies
- Improve educational access and quality

Crafted Specialty Foods

Besides large scale bio-processing, other agriculture-based opportunities exist in more traditional cash crop and food processing sectors for the regional market of Metro Chicago. The City is in a good position to capitalize on the growing urban market for specialty and organic, smaller-batch “slow” foods that are produced and marketed locally and exhibit a distinctly regional flavor.

Major national health food retailers such as Trader Joes, Whole Foods, Outpost, and Magic Mill, as well as a rising number of independent food co-ops, are aggressively penetrating major urban markets in the Midwest. These are generally stores that compete on quality, uniqueness, and health benefits and frequently look to partner with local food producers who can differentiate and localize their merchandise mix. Agricultural value added products may include specialty organic produce and packaged goods that use predominantly locally grown ingredients.

Sterling’s proximity to both the main food producing regions in the state as well as its largest food market (Chicago) gives it a logistical leg up in building a specialty food sector. Again, the creation of this sector will require area farmers to rethink their crop and market orientation including consideration of organically grown foods and the cultivation of specialty crops.

- Protect/celebrate farm heritage
- Connect farmers to area restaurants, specialty grocers
- Establish a visible local marketplace (regional farmers market)
- Create strong regional brand association

Skilled-Crafts Center

This is conceived as a guild of artisans and skilled craftsmen catering to the building and home improvement trades— coppersmiths, furniture makers/restorers, antique dealers, blacksmiths, stonecutters, potters, art glass makers, cabinetmakers and artisan foods containing locally grown ingredients. This could be organized as a destination wholesaling center for homebuilders, design professionals, and specialty retailers and housed in a single, large building - preferably in a former downtown/riverfront factory building. It would be open to the public and feature “watch-able craftsmanship” in a transparent workshop/showroom setting. It would be actively managed with vendors co-marketing their wares and entering into collaborative relationships with each other and with regional trade schools.

This opportunity stems from the region’s history in furniture and hardware making and builds on the national home improvements craze centered largely in Chicago. This concept takes advantage of the existing furniture mart in nearby Kewanee and generally works well within a heritage tourism context in which historic preservation and an appreciation of hand-tooled and specialty housewares are a natural fit. The City should work to:

- Identify Downtown location
- Preserve historic character of buildings/City
- Collaborate with area trade/art schools
- Grow arts community and building trades
- Facilitate connections with small business support services and advisors
- Foster a restoration culture and ethos

3. Making It Happen

a. Pursue Regionally-based Economic Development

- Mature and expand the Sauk Valley Partnership
- Engage in targeted business recruitment
- Partner with outside investors including Union Pacific Railroad
- Involve business leaders

b. Build Institutional Supports

- Establish young professionals networks
- Establish Downtown Sterling Unlimited (development corp.)
- Formalize the Sauk Valley Partnership
- Create individual project management teams for major projects, initiatives

c. Downtown/Riverfront Reinvestment

- Work with the hospital and local companies to develop employee walk-to-work programs (down-payment assistance, forgivable loans) targeted toward specific neighborhood reinvestment zones.
- Organize, mobilize Downtown Business Association
- Establish a Downtown Redevelopment Authority
- Program Downtown for special events, activities
- Capitalize façade improvement grants and start up loans for Downtown businesses

d. Complete the Economic Development Toolset

- Pursue aggressive use of Tax Increment Financing, Sewer Service Areas and other economic development incentives
- Develop strong print and web-based marketing materials
- Develop special economic development website with local commercial-industrial property listings
- Apply for Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA) grants for transportation improvements
- Leverage, package New Markets Tax Credits, Economic Development Associations' funds with private investment
- Solicit support from state political representatives
- Prioritize, assemble, remediate brownfields

e. Special Stimulus Projects

- Work with state tourism officials to map president's "circle tour".
- Enlist Union Pacific to build a transportation history center and UP retail store in Downtown/riverfront
- Build a train/river observation bridge
- Establish a Downtown Farmers/Flea Market
- Establish a skilled-crafts incubator ("Archifacts")

I. Community Facilities and Utilities Plan

This element of the Comprehensive Plan is designed to summarize the implications of the recommended land use pattern and transportation network on community facilities and public utilities. More detailed planning will be required to refine these broad recommendations as opportunities or needs for community facilities arise.

1. Park and Recreation Facilities

The current Sterling Park District and City park and recreational facilities provide Sterling residents with both active and passive recreational opportunities, provide a connection to nature, serve as community focal points, increase surrounding property values, and enhance overall quality of life. However, the City and the Sterling Park District must plan for continued park and recreational facilities for these to be provided in adequate numbers, types, and locations to meet the demands of future growth.

This Comprehensive Strategic Plan recommends the following:

- Development of a City-wide riverwalk system. Connections from the riverwalk trail to the City can be provided by the existing historic viaducts.
- Creation of active space along the riverwalk that encourages pedestrian and bicycle use.
- Creation of more pedestrian entrances onto a riverwalk and enhancement of pedestrian access through various, clearly marked paths.
- Incorporation of the riverwalk with regional trails (such as the Upper Dam and Hennepin Canal trails), the historic Downtown, and to the Historic Dillon Home Museum and Sinnissippi Park.
- Create easements all along the riverwalk to ensure a continuous riverwalk rather than one that is broken up by private property.
- Maintenance of river viewsheds by preserving openings at the River's edge (such as the views down streets that run from north to south).

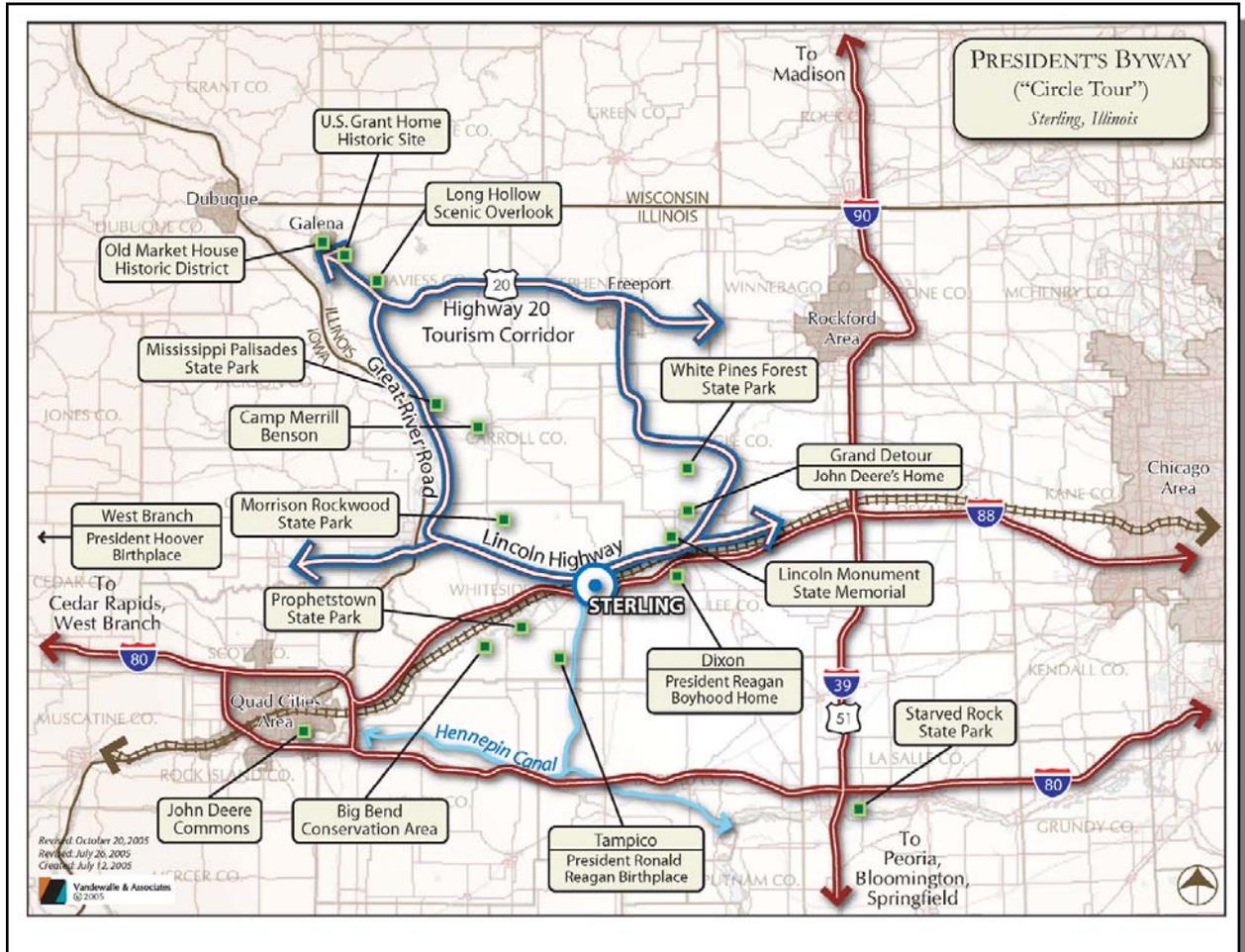
2. Historic Resources

Sterling must preserve and restore visible reminders of its past. Sterling's historic character can serve as a foundation for establishing the community as a regional tourist destination, spurring revitalization of the City Center District, and serving as focal points along a community walking and bicycle path system.

Sterling has a very rich historical base, including the Sterling Historic District, Downtown Sterling, and the Northwestern Wire and Steel riverfront operations. Specific recommendations relative to historic preservation include the following:

- The City should cooperate with its neighboring communities to designate a President's Tri-way connecting Dixon/Tampico to Galena via the Lincoln Highway and the Great River Road.
- The City should continue to promote the efforts of the Sterling Mural Society.
- The City should consider establishing a Downtown façade grant program to assist property owners in improving and restoring their buildings in accordance with the design guidelines.
- The City should work with property owners to mark historically significant buildings with tasteful plaques to recognize their value. This could reinforce community pride and encourage tourism activity.

- The City should consider adopting overlay zoning districts for the Sterling Historic District and Downtown Sterling. Historic overlay districts are intended to implement design recommendations to preserve and enhance historic character. In such systems, the Historic Commission typically reviews and approves exterior remodeling plans before building permits are issued.
- The City should complete a detailed Downtown Master Plan to enhance historic preservation and economic development opportunities.



3. Municipal Facilities and Services

As the City continues to grow, the demand for administrative and public safety facilities and services will also increase.

Fire Department space appears to be adequate to meet current demands. However, as growth occurs, increased staffing levels may be necessary.

This Comprehensive Strategic Plan did not include a direct evaluation of space needs for administrative, public works/community development, or police services. As the City expands, increased demands will be placed on its municipal facilities. During the course of this planning process, some specific community facility improvements or additions were identified. This *Plan* recommends a formal study for the further exploration and investigation on the following community facility and service enhancements.

The Coliseum is not well suited for its current operations. There is a need to develop a facility devoted to the needs of the Police Department and to better serve City Administration. Public safety entities have specific facility needs to promote safe and efficient operations. The current facilities do not allow the departments to keep all of their necessary equipment on site, do not afford space for training purposes, and do not effectively separate their public operations from their private operations (questioning, booking, and holding personnel). The feasibility study should delineate space needs and possible locations.

4. Public School Facilities

The City and Community Unit School District #5 should discuss opportunities to enhance services to residents of all ages. School District facilities are sufficient to meet the projected community needs.

5. Public Utilities

The City should encourage the various public utilities to prepare and update utility system master plans in response to the growth recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan.

It is also very important that the City effectively communicate its land use and development policies to the public utilities. Otherwise, independent decisions of those utilities may run contrary to the objectives of this plan. The City and Chamber of Commerce should also work with public utilities to promote and facilitate economic development and business retention in the community.

Stormwater management is becoming an increasingly important issue as flooding becomes an increasingly frequent occurrence. The City should ensure rigorous stormwater management measures are implemented to decrease flooding potential “downstream” during storm events. Principles that should be embodied include the following:

- Prevent increases in the extent of the existing regulatory floodplain, integrate stormwater storage into the design of all new development and redevelopment projects.
- Recognize area-wide stormwater storage is preferred over individual on-site storage to provide lower flood elevations and provide amenities such as wildlife habitat and recreation.
- Reduce stormwater release quantities to pre-development rates, and produce water quality benefits that exceed typical standards.
- Continue stormwater management treatment systems that focus on Best Management Practices (BMPs) rather than conventional engineering strategies. BMPs may include overland transfer, natural landscaping to increase infiltration and reduce runoff, bio-infiltration systems, residential roof runoff directed to pervious yard areas, maximum impervious surface ratios for development sites, and narrower street cross-sections.
- Minimize and localize soil disturbance during construction.
- Reduce the area that needs to be graded in any new project by maximizing passive open space.

IV. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A. Importance of Plan Implementation

Chapters II and III of this Plan include many recommendations for directing the growth, development, and redevelopment of the City of Sterling over the next 20 years. While some of these recommendations may be applied directly and immediately to certain decisions the City can make, other recommendations will require subsequent Plan implementation activities. This section of the Plan summarizes these activities.

The following implementation steps are included directly in this Plan for two reasons. First, addressing these topics in the Plan will help establish their legal defensibility later. For example, changes to a local codes and ordinances are far more defensible if they are designed in accordance with a comprehensive plan. Second, including implementation recommendations provides specific follow-up actions to fully realize the vision, objectives, and recommendations contained in this Plan. Where specific implementation steps are not followed, each new decision or development project will tend to take the City *away* from Comprehensive Strategic Plan recommendations. Particularly in a place like Sterling, which currently enjoys an excellent balance between the quality of life and the cost of living, failure to implement this Plan will “cost” the City in the future.

B. Plan Adoption and Amendments

A first step in implementing this Comprehensive Strategic Plan is making sure it is adopted in a manner which supports its future use for more detailed decision making. The following is the recommended process to adopt this Comprehensive Plan. This process is in full compliance with Illinois Statutes.

1. City Planning Commission holds a public hearing on the Plan, then recommends that the City Council adopt the Plan as is or with specific changes.
2. City Council holds a public hearing on the Plan, preceded by not less than 15 days notice of the hearing in the community newspaper.
3. Following the public hearing, the City Council adopts the Plan by resolution. The Plan becomes effective ten days after the City Clerk files notice of its approval with the County Recorder.

Once adopted, the City should provide copies of the Comprehensive Strategic Plans to all appropriate government agencies and districts. In general, all proposed development that follows should be made to conform to the adopted Plan. Where logical amendments to the Plan are proposed, the Plan should be amended prior to development approval following the procedure outlined above. Although more time consuming, this more rigorous approach will ensure that the Plan remains vital and meaningful.

The City Planning Commission should annually gauge progress on plan implementation, and review Plan recommendations for logical amendments based on changes in conditions within the City. A more detailed review and update of the Plan should be performed every five to ten years.

C. Plan Implementation Recommendations

1. More Detailed Planning Efforts

At times, this Comprehensive Strategic Plan is general in some of its recommendations. The Plan does, however, advise the preparation of more detailed plans over the next several years to provide more specific guidance in key areas. These plans are described in greater detail elsewhere in this report, but are summarized as follows:

- Prepare a Downtown Master Plan including the following components: (a) Downtown and riverfront master plan, (b) design guidelines for Downtown and surrounding historic neighborhoods, (c) streetscape plan for the entire Downtown and riverfront area, (d) master plans for the development of riverfront parks or plazas, and (e) conceptual redevelopment plans for the former Northwester Wire and Steel, Lawrence Hardware, and National Hardware properties.
- Prepare a Sidewalk Plan and Policy for the City.
- Prepare Strategic Neighborhood Area Plans to address neighborhood-level concerns and issues
- Prepare or require Neighborhood Development Plans for each of the planned residential and mixed used growth areas illustrated in Map 6: Planned Land Use – City and Map 7: Planned Land Use – 5-mile Area.
- Prepare a formal study for the further exploration and investigation on the administrative and public safety facility needs and service enhancements.
- Engage in planning efforts with the City of Rock Falls and Whiteside County to ensure the preservation and long-term viability of the Whiteside County Airport as an economic development asset.
- Prepare a Comprehensive Parks and Open Space Plan in conjuncture with the Sterling Parks District for the entire community to identify the desired location, improvements, and costs for planned community parks and bicycle and pedestrian system improvements
- Support the update of utility master plans prepared by the various utility districts in a manner which reflects the recommendations of this Strategic Plan.

2. Policies

Policies are rules, courses of action, or programs used to ensure Plan implementation and to accomplish the goals and objectives. City decision-makers should use policies on a day-to-day basis. Success in achieving policies is usually measurable. This Plan recommends the following:

- The City should condition extending public infrastructure (municipal sewer and water) for extraterritorial or interchange development, on satisfactory pre-annexation agreements. The agreements shall specify that the property will be subject to the City's codes and ordinances, including building construction, development aesthetics, and site design.
- The City shall actively pursue enforcement of codes and ordinances to promote community aesthetics, neighborhoods stabilization, and safety. Enforcement will require coordinated efforts of the Community Services and Police Departments.
- The City will implement a balanced residential policy, as outlined in Section III, to distribute multi-family development within the community to avoid over-concentrations in any one neighborhood.
- The City needs to be a leader in coordinating the economic development efforts in and around Sterling. This includes promoting the interdependence of the Sterling, Rock Falls, and County economic development agencies, identifying a concise economic development vision, and establishing clearly-defined roles and responsibilities for each agency.

3. Regulations

a. Zoning Ordinance

Strategic amendments to the City's 1994 zoning ordinance should be pursued to implement the land use and community character recommendations of this Plan. In particular, the City should incorporate the following changes to its zoning ordinance:

- Incorporate building design standards in the zoning ordinance which reflect desired high-quality design and respect for the historic, small town character of the community. Use multiple-family housing, commercial, and industrial development policies as a basis for these updated standards, and incorporate Downtown design standards prepared as part of a Downtown Master Plan.
- Rezone properties where necessary to match the land use plan map recommendations. Specifically, to maintain the integrity of the areas surrounding the Central Business District.
- Consider a Historic Overlay District for parts of the Downtown and “Mansion Row” areas.
- Develop regulations to provide opportunities for traditional neighborhood development in strategic areas of the community.
- Update site access, parking lot design, and lighting standards to reflect desired development character.

b. Subdivision Ordinance

This Comprehensive Plan recommends a complete update to the City’s subdivision ordinance to implement this Comprehensive Plan. The City’s current subdivision ordinance meets basic requirements, but often does not include modern, detailed standards for lot layout, street design, park dedication, and lots created in the City’s extraterritorial review jurisdiction. In particular, the City should incorporate the following changes to its land division ordinance:

- Require that subdividers conduct and submit detailed analyses of existing site conditions before submittal of tentative plats, including wetland and floodplain boundaries and locations of mature trees. This will assure that environmental protection, stormwater management, view protection, and other community character objectives of this Plan can be met.
- Update design standards to meet residential development policy recommendations. Updated design standards should also have as their goal assuring continuity in the community’s development pattern, rather than having each subdivision operate as its own isolated enclave.
- Continue to enforce stormwater management practices which ensure post-development stormwater run-off from the site is equal to or less than pre-development conditions.
- Institute a street tree planting requirement.
- Implement Short- and Long-Term Growth Boundaries and Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system to establish standards for review and approval of lots within the City’s extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). The City may apply size, density, and layout standards specific to lots outside the City limits. For example, the City’s subdivision ordinance may require that lots created in portions of the extraterritorial jurisdiction designated as Agriculture on the land use plan not exceed an overall density of one residential unit for every 35 acres owned by the property owner.

c. Official Map Ordinance

The City should prepare and enforce an Official Map. Planned new arterial and collector road rights-of-way, drainage facilities, and proposed park and utility locations should be included on the Official Map. All new development proposals would then have to comply with the recommendations of that Official Map.

4. Financing

The financial implications of planning are of increasing importance. This Plan reinforces the need for public expenditures for streets, utilities, parks, and public buildings and sites. More importantly, mapping logical land use patterns, transportation systems, and recreation facilities will help the City more accurately predict costs and benefits of alternative public investment options and private

development decisions. Finally, the Comprehensive Plan establishes a legally valid base level of analysis—the future land use and transportation pattern—for the imposition of impact fees. The following financial planning tools should be used and strengthened to help implement the recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan.

a. Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

The City must focus on implementation of its Capital Improvements Program (CIP) to manage municipal financing and avoid budgetary “spikes.” The CIP allocates municipal funding to various projects over a three to ten year period, and provides an understanding to City officials, department heads, and residents how tax dollars will be allocated. The recommendations of this Plan will assist the City in identifying and prioritizing a list of possible capital projects.

b. Impact Fees

The land use, transportation, and recreational facility recommendations of this Plan allow the City to evaluate a number of different fee alternatives designed to ensure that the costs associated with providing service to a new development are borne by that development and not the general taxpayer. Illinois law validates the use of impact fees for a wide variety of facilities which concern municipalities. In particular, the City of Sterling should explore the use of impact fees to fund at least part of the following capital projects: park improvements, off-site stormwater management systems, off-site road improvements, schools; and new and expanded municipal buildings (e.g., administrative, police, fire, library). The City should work with surrounding municipalities and Whiteside County to promote relatively equal impact fees across communities.

c. Development Review Cost Recovery

Development review services in the City are currently provided primarily by in-house City staff and the Plan Commission, with occasional assistance from planning, engineering, and legal consultants. The City has the ability to adopt regulations that ensure that the costs incurred by the City to hire experts are reimbursed or pre-paid by the applicant whose project is initiating the cost. The City should consider adopting such regulations to fund, at least in part, ongoing current planning assistance to the Plan Commission.

5. Intergovernmental Relations

The multi-jurisdictional environment in which this Plan is prepared entails, by necessity, a complex set of intergovernmental relationships which must be taken into account.

a. State Relations

The Illinois Department of Transportation and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency are actively involved in programs and policies which directly affect—and are affected by—local land use decisions. Local recognition and, where appropriate, promotion of the policies of these agencies is an imperative coordination tool. State policies are also implemented through aggressive promotion of “best practices” for the mitigation of the impacts which land use decisions have on transportation facilities and environmental resources (e.g., access control, stormwater management). Finally, controlled growth and compact development served by sanitary sewer facilities, as promoted through this Plan, will accommodate population pressures in a manner which minimizes adverse impacts on systems of Statewide importance.

Close coordination with State agencies on several specific issues is recommended over the life of the Plan. This includes cooperative efforts with Illinois Department of Transportation on issues related to I-88 and the Lincoln Highway and continued coordination with Illinois Environmental Protection Agency on brownfield redevelopment. Additionally, the City will need to continue to

cooperate with the Illinois DNR to promote redevelopment along the river front, specifically for a riverwalk.

b. County Relations

The City of Sterling intends to work closely with Whiteside County to jointly implement shared planning objectives for the Greater Sterling area, and to identify and resolve any differences. The City will need County support to ensure farmland preservation in rural areas, and directing most growth to urban areas where a full range of urban services are available. Specific areas of cooperation should be directed towards coming to mutual understanding on development goals and practices at the fringes of the City.

c. Local Government Relations

The Sterling area is expected to grow as a result of many forces that are beyond the control of the City. In order to ensure that this area will maintain its high quality of life, coordination of plans and development actions between the City and the City of Rock Falls will be necessary; specifically:

- Review land divisions and development proposals in the ETJ, especially at the I-88 interchanges.
- Establish a clear vision and redevelopment direction for the IL 40 corridor as it extends from I-88 to the City of Sterling.
- Cooperate on riverfront redevelopment and promote the use of the River.
- Preserve the Whiteside County Airport and its environs as assets for economic development.
- Seize any opportunity for informal planning with the City of Rock Falls. In particular, this could include an intergovernmental agreement addressing future boundaries and development practices.

6. City Procedures

The final key to successful plan implementation entails the processes used to review development proposals and take municipal actions. The most effective results are produced by proposal review systems which integrate plan recommendations, regulatory controls, professional staff recommendations, appointed body consideration, and elected official actions.

a. Role of Plans

This Comprehensive Strategic Plan and subsequent detailed planning efforts should guide review of typical development proposals and public investment actions. All private proposals, public policy proposals, and City spending decisions related to land use and economic development should be reviewed by the City Planning Commission prior to final City Council approval. Such land use and economic development reviews should be based on *consistency* with this Plan.

b. Role of Regulations

This Plan advises the review and update of the City's development regulations. Ideally, planning related regulations should provide a bridge between the recommendations of adopted plans and the proposed development review or public investment decision. Regulations are the "law of the City," and therefore should be abided in all cases. The City should not "negotiate away" its ordinances through pre-annexation agreements or other means.

c. Role of City Staff

Municipal staff and hired consultants must assist applicants in following procedures, and provide officials with all information necessary to make informed decisions. Staff should help applicants refine their proposals to bring them into full consistency with established policies and standards of City plans and ordinances.

d. Role of Advisory Boards and Commissions

Advisory boards and commissions should evaluate proposals from a substantive, rather than a political, point of view. As individuals and as a group, they are less constrained by political expediency. Therefore, they should feel comfortable challenging applicants and staff to make the best possible case for their proposals and recommendations. This Plan recommends the formation of a Historic Commission to manage activities related to historic preservation and promotion in Sterling.

e. Role of Elected Officials

Elected officials must make their decisions from the standpoint of overall community impact—tempered by site-specific factors. They must balance plan recommendations, ordinance requirements, applicant objectives, staff advice, and recommendations of advisory boards with their own judgment.

APPENDIX: STRATEGIC PLAN ABBREVIATIONS

BID: Business Improvement District
BMP: Best Management Practices
CBD: Central Business District
CGH: Community General Hospital Medical Center
CIP: Capital Improvements Program
DCEO: Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
EDA: Economic Development Associations
EDI: Economic Development Initiative
ETJ: Extraterritorial Jurisdiction
FEMA: Federal Emergency Management Agency
FTZ: Foreign Trade Zone
HUD: Department of Housing and Urban Development
IHDA: Illinois Housing Development Authority
IL ROUTE 2: Lincoln Highway
ITC: Investment Tax Credit
LESA: Land Evaluation and Site Assessment
NIU: Northern Illinois University
QCIA: Quad City International Airport
RECDS: Rural Economic Community Development Services
RFD: Greater Rockford Airport
SD & EER: Sterling, Dixon and Eastern Electric Railway
SNAP: Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans
SSA: Sewer Service Area
STH: State Trunk Highway
TDR: Transfer of Development Rights
TEA: Transportation Economic Assistance
TID: Tax Increment District
TIF: Tax Increment Financing
UP: Union Pacific
USH: United States Highway
WACC: Whiteside Area Career Center
WWTP: Waste Water Treatment Plant

APPENDIX: PHOTOGRAPH & ILLUSTRATION CAPTIONS

Page	Caption
5	Top: Aerial view of Rock River; Bottom: View of Rock River from Oppold Marina
14	Top: Historic mural <i>3rd Street and Locust circa 1907</i> ; Bottom: Historic mural <i>Sterling Founder Hezekiah Brink</i>
15	Top: Graphic depicting the location of historic murals in Sterling; Bottom: Historic mural <i>First Avenue Bridge circa 1876 – 1924</i>
25	The Grandon Civic Center located in downtown Sterling.
26	Historic Coliseum Building located on 3 rd Avenue that contains City Hall, Police Station, and civic auditorium.
31	Top: Community General Hospital Medical Center; Bottom: Sterling High School
35	Community vision workshop participation held in June 2005 in the civic auditorium.
53	Graphic depicting a riverwalk development.
54	Top: Condominium and restaurant development located along the Milwaukee River riverwalk in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Middle: View of the Rock River and National Hardware Headquarters buildings; Bottom: Historic rail viaduct located along the Rock River near the historic Dillon Home.
55	Top: Graphic depicting central business design characteristics; Bottom: Graphic depicting desired retail/office design criteria in central business district.
56	Historic mansion located on the West 3 rd Street corridor that is ripe for rehabilitation.
57	Graphic depicting desired neighborhood development characteristics.
58	Graphic depicting desired design characteristics for mixed use centers.
65	Graphic illustrating traditional neighborhood development design characteristics.
67	Illustration of desired development characteristics along collector or local arterial roadways.
77	Photograph of community entry feature for City of Monona, Wisconsin.
78	Entry feature from Shorewood, Wisconsin that is appropriate to distinguish between communities or neighborhoods.
80	Graphic illustrating desired commercial development characteristics.
81	Graphic illustrating appropriate industrial/manufacturing development characteristics.
88	Top: Illustration of a typical street cross-section to accommodate bicycle travel lanes; Bottom: Illustration of an off-street recreational trail/bicycle path cross-section.
98	Illustration of historic <i>President's Byway</i> regional opportunities.

