

## Chapter 11 – Strategic Resources Protection and Resiliency:2040

A resilient Earlham is one that can accommodate growth, protect its good features and assets, and withstand challenges. This chapter outlines a vision and goals designed to protect the area’s quality farmland, vulnerable environment, and various assets from hazards. The term strategic is used to focus attention where needed. For example, not all farmland is high quality farmland, and sometimes the balance between preservation and development must be weighed. Partnerships with Madison and Dallas Counties – as well as private property owners – is necessary to accomplish resiliency as the community experiences development pressure.

This chapter discusses:

- Summary of current conditions from Chapter 3.
- Summary of public input about future strategic resources protection and resiliency needs and vision.
- Analysis of future threats to resources and resiliency.
- Thoughts on prioritizing strategic resources protection.
- Strategic resources protection and resiliency goals, polices, and action items.

### Summary of Current Conditions

The following matrix itemizes the positive and negative characteristics identified in the background research concerning the topic of this chapter.

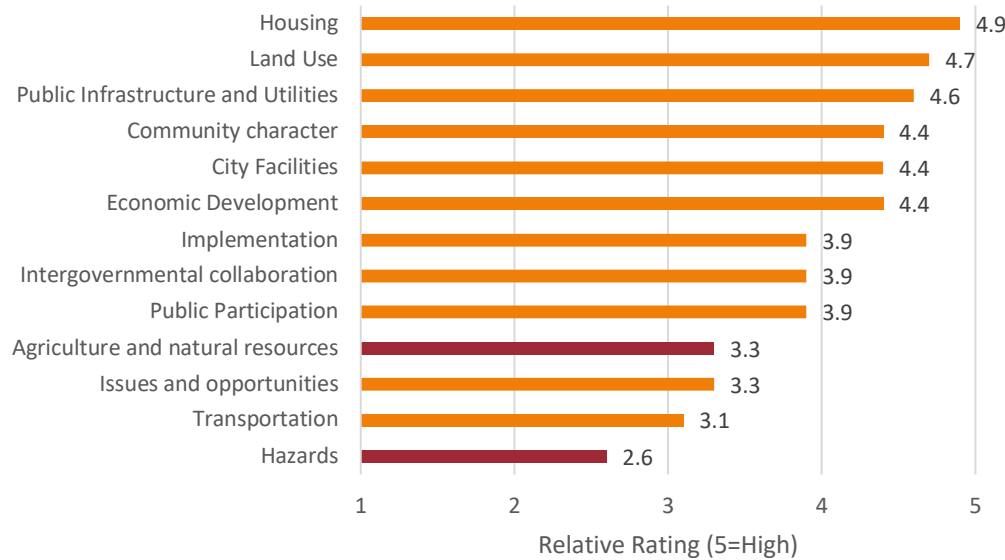
**Figure 11.1: Current Conditions Matrix for Strategic Resources Protection and Resiliency**

Thriving Earlham	Struggling Earlham
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not just is most of the land intensively farmed, but most of the farmland is prime or high-quality farmland.</li><li>• Earlham participated in the most recent Madison County Hazard Mitigation Plan.</li><li>• Resources such as tree cover, waterways, and topography promote quality development potential without too many threats to the environment.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Soils are suitable for development, although high clay content in the area means some large projects may require soil amendments to ensure development can occur.</li><li>• Small stream floodplains and wetlands can prevent or threaten development potential, and new development can threaten these resources.</li></ul>

### Summary of Public Input About Strategic Resources Protection and Resiliency Needs and Vision

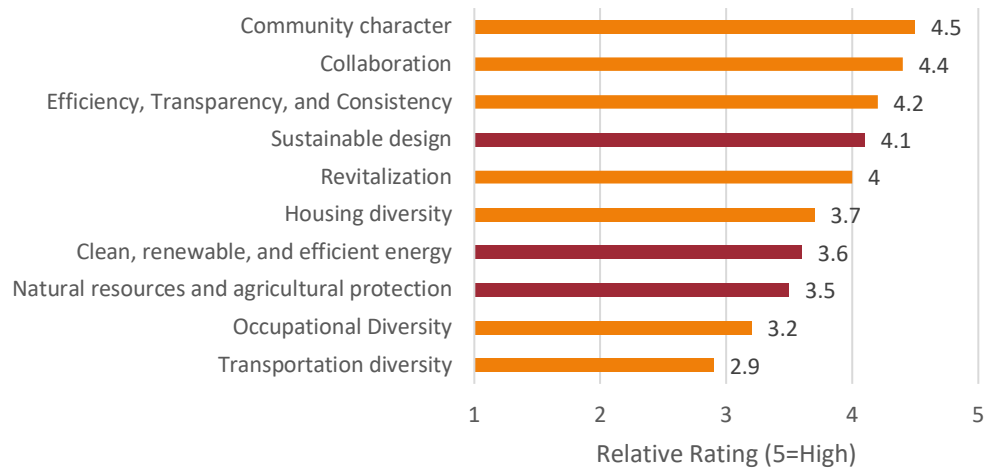
People are concerned about the preservation of farmland and the protection of the environment, with the main concern too rapid, unplanned, or excessive development. This may have motivated steering committee members to rate land use as a high priority plan topic or element. People are also concerned about the overall balance of need for land to develop and the rights of property owners to develop land how or when they wish.

**Figure 11.2: Relative Importance of Iowa Smart Planning 13 Planning Elements According to the Steering Committee**



Agriculture and natural resource protection is a low-moderate priority of the 13 Iowa Smart Planning Elements. Hazards is the lowest priority among steering committee members.

**Figure 11.3: Relative Importance of Iowa Smart Planning 10 Planning Principles According to the Steering Committee**



Natural resources and agricultural protection is a low-moderate ranked priority among the 10 Smart Planning Principles. Sustainable design, another principle that is highly related to preservation, is mid-high ranked. Clean and renewable energy, often developed in agricultural areas and/or using agricultural inputs, is moderately ranked. Other planning principles, such as collaboration, community character, revitalization, revitalization, and efficiency/transparency/consistency are key to the implementation of goals, actions, and policies related to this topic.

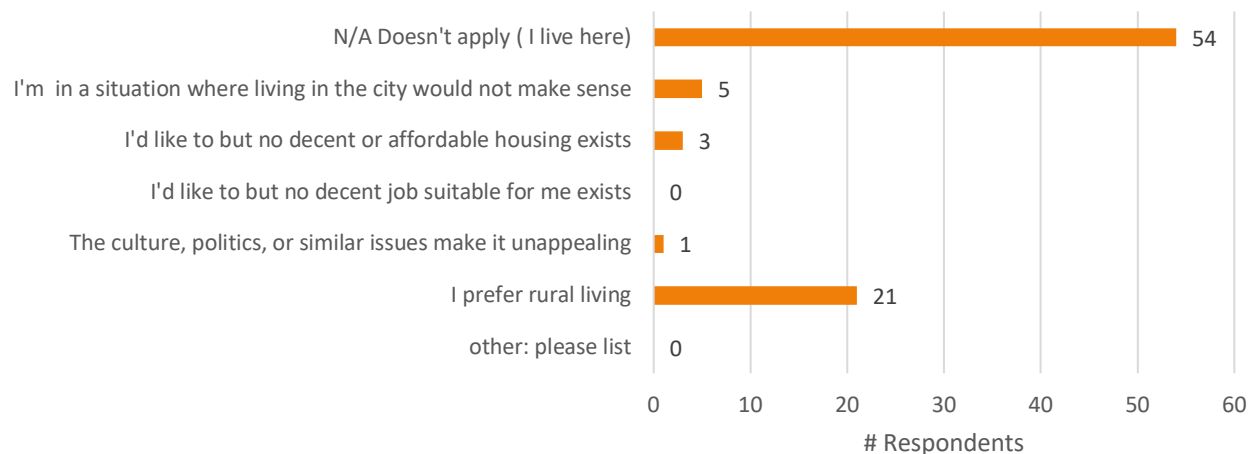
**Figure 11.4: Steering Committee Four Questions Exercise Comments Related to Strategic Resources Protection and Resiliency**

Biggest Opportunities	Biggest Challenges	One Big Dream	One Big Fear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small town environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of development land.</li> <li>• Acquiring land for growth – buildings for new businesses.</li> <li>• Incorporating farmland in zones.</li> <li>• Being landlocked for development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smart growth.</li> <li>• I want Earlham to be a destination town for families to take roots and raise their family. They do so because the schools are strong, the town is safe, the community is supportive and self-sustaining.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Losing the small-town feel.</li> <li>• Not being able to keep up with our growth. No housing available. Landlocked.</li> <li>• Growing too fast and losing the small-town environment.</li> </ul>

Eighty-four people responded to the community survey question asking about public satisfaction with several community amenities. One of these was access to locally grown foods/agrotourism. Overall, the respondents were unsatisfied.

The community survey also asked about *future* strategic resources protection and resiliency, as shown in the following graphics.

**Figure 11.5: Community Survey Results: “If You Live Outside of Earlham, What Is the Main Reason as to Why You Do Not Live in the City?”**



This question sheds some light on living in the rural area around Earlham. Most people who live outside of town do so simply because they prefer it.

**Figure 11.6: Survey Respondent Thoughts About Earlham Related to Strategic Resources Protection and Resiliency (Number of Responses)**

Favorite Thing	Least Favorite Thing	Most Important Places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-sufficient community (2)</li> <li>• Hardware store (2)</li> <li>• Well maintained</li> <li>• Grocery store</li> <li>• Casey's is on edge of town.</li> <li>• Well-kept homes</li> <li>• Respect for agriculture</li> <li>• Incredible volunteer forces</li> <li>• Forward thinking leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landlocked for growth (2)</li> <li>• People that try to make Earlham a big city. (2)</li> <li>• Older areas of town that need revitalization</li> <li>• Could be swallowed up by Dallas County growth</li> <li>• People that complain but don't suggest how to fix problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grocery store (26)</li> <li>• Hardware Hank (16)</li> <li>• Hometown Market (12)</li> <li>• Pharmacy (7)</li> <li>• Dr. Office/clinic (6)</li> <li>• Casey's (4)</li> <li>• Bank (4)</li> <li>• Heartland Coop (4)</li> <li>• Salons (4)</li> <li>• Harmony Farm (4)</li> <li>• Heirloom Farm (4)</li> </ul>

Favorite Thing	Least Favorite Thing	Most Important Places
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grade A Gardens (4)</li> <li>• Lillie's Plumbing and Heating (4)</li> <li>• EBC (3)</li> <li>• Police/fire (3)</li> </ul>

What Should Stay the Same?	What Should Change?	What Would Make Earlham a Better Place to Live
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small town feel/rural (25)</li> <li>• Limit housing developments, can't stay a small town with too much development (2)</li> <li>• "Keep surrounding areas from overtaking us."</li> <li>• Keep it removed from Des Moines.</li> <li>• Respect farmers and their land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More housing/affordable housing/rural and in town, more rental options (11)</li> <li>• Improve/grow infrastructure (3)</li> <li>• Cell and internet options (2)</li> <li>• More revenue options, especially for future development needs (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlled development including amenities/moderate steady growth (4)</li> <li>• More essential businesses (3) with a focus on preserving its past and small-town agricultural feel</li> <li>• Better roads (2)</li> <li>• Better cell/internet coverage (2)</li> <li>• Keeping the school local</li> <li>• More housing- especially for teachers</li> <li>• Better storm sewers</li> <li>• The promise that certain parcels of land will remain agriculture and will not turn into developments (or if developments happen, current residents will have an opportunity to express their feelings)"</li> <li>• "I feel like there is now almost too much as far as police &amp; fire trucks. While I appreciate these items, I feel 3 cops is a lot when many other towns do not even have one. The fire staff seems to get a lot of new vehicles &amp; keep the older ones."</li> </ul>

As the matrix in Figure 11.6 shows, people want a resilient community with resources to help the city recover from hazard events, such as cell services, grocery stores, and emergency services. They also value agriculture, agrotourism sites, and property rights of those who own land in and around the city. Figure 11.7 repeats the four-question exercise used with the steering committee (Figure 11.4) but with a bigger audience of about 75 people who attended the community forum in October 2023.

**Figure 11.7: Community Forum Four Questions Exercise Comments Related to Strategic Resources Protection and Resiliency**

Biggest Opportunities	Biggest Challenges	One Big Dream	One Big Fear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlled growth</li> <li>• Showcasing our strengths</li> <li>• Growth from within our community</li> <li>• Self-sustaining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of building lots</li> <li>• Balanced growth</li> <li>• Space</li> <li>• Lack of land</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• Truly maintaining small town feel with urban sprawl</li> <li>• To keep growth from ruining what we have</li> <li>• Landlocked with agriculture</li> <li>• Growing responsibly so we are still a smaller town</li> <li>• Keeping businesses/farms locally owned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of building lots</li> <li>• Houses north of Casey's</li> <li>• Balanced growth</li> <li>• No huge subdivisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncontrolled growth, over-development</li> <li>• Earlham growing too big</li> <li>• Unnecessary growth</li> <li>• No houses north of Casey's</li> <li>• Development blends into Des Moines</li> <li>• Earlham forcing others outside of town to be annexed, raising my taxes</li> <li>• Taking farmland from families</li> <li>• Too big</li> <li>• To keep growth from ruining what we have</li> </ul>

The “opinion casting” exercise used scale bars as another way to gain understanding on where people are on a range of thought concerning a few issues. The following are some of the key findings for about 20 people who participated that relate to strategic resources protection and resiliency.

- The group believes slightly (55% vs. 45%) that incentives should be focused on the latest and best opportunities rather than focused on struggling neighborhoods.
- 75% feel that environmental sustainability should be a high priority.
- 80% state that the City of Earlham should leave farmland alone and let the private sector work.
- The group is slightly (55%/45%) in favor of focusing public dollars on quality-of-life items versus infrastructure.
- The group believes moderately (60%/40%) that metro growth threatens Earlham.

### **Analysis of Future Threats to Resources and Resiliency**

Earlham is subject to several threats to its resources (natural and human) and resiliency. There are explored in the following paragraphs.

#### *Natural Disasters*

Fortunately, river flooding is not a major concern for Earlham, like it is for many communities. However, the city is subject to many other hazards, such as a flash and street flooding, various kinds of storm events, high winds and tornadoes, and other hazards. It is likely that the severity of storm events and other environmental hazards (such as severe droughts) will increase. It is important that Earlham remain vigilant in its mitigation planning and implementation efforts. The community should remain engaged in the five-year hazard mitigation plan updates that Madison County completes and seek funding to implement projects listed in the plan. The comprehensive plan can include development strategies and land use regulations that reduce risk. An example is the imposition of zoning regulations that keep development outside of flood risk areas.

#### *Human-related and Infrastructure Hazards*

These hazards are intensified due to the busy interstate close to town. Auto accidents, especially with the release of hazardous materials, put the town at risk. The railroad adds to this risk. Structural failure is a growing concern as buildings age. Quality construction practices and the use of building codes will help overcome some of these issues. Proper mapping will reduce some threats to underground infrastructure resulting from accidental damage during excavation. Domestic terrorism and crime are increasing threats in small town Iowa.

#### *Excessive Conversion of Farmland and Spoiling of Wetlands*

This plan should be used to help identify areas where prime farmland and wetlands exist that should be preserved. Development policies should limit development in these areas unless existing development is already adjacent to those areas. Use of tools like Corn Suitability Ratings can be the basis for these policies. The City and partners should also work with farmers and landowners to ensure that development is located and develops at a pace that makes sense. The concern over being landlocked because no one will sell or development happening too fast because everyone will sell is warranted.

#### *Growing Too Fast for Services and Infrastructure*

The public engagement process identified a recurring concern over the town growing too fast for the school. The school has limited space to meet population growth. It would hurt Earlham if the school was relocated out of town because it can no longer be accommodated on the current site. In this way, growth can cause the city to become less resilient, as people leave town if the school is lost. Being unable to afford housing due to growth demand can also hinder the school’s ability to hire and retain teachers.

### *Wind Turbines and Other Environmental Concerns*

Industrial-scale wind turbines have become controversial around the region, as they can impact the quality of life negatively for many residents. These are built as close as eight miles west of Earlham. Other environmental concerns are water and air quality. It is important for Earlham to continue to encourage trees and vegetation in the community and address farmland erosion that may affect the town. The continued development of gravel mining near the town creates dust and wears down the road system. When a mining area is exhausted, it is vital that Earlham discuss plans with property owners so that a productive use of these sites is more likely, one that benefits the city.

### **Thoughts on Prioritizing Strategic Resources Protection**

Throughout the planning process, one of the most notable public comments and research findings was that people want to ensure that the great quality of life and character of Earlham be preserved and that the greatest threat to that was unmanaged growth. The following are some things to consider as you prioritize land use and development decisions that grow or otherwise transform the community.

- Does the development design complement the land and resources in the area?
- Does the development attract the type of land use pattern and demographics needed and beneficial to the city?
- How can “green”, low-impact, and/or sustainable infrastructure be incorporated?
- How can development be phased over time?
- How can the City and partners manage area resources when interacting with property owners?
- Who should own property that needs protected and how should it be funded?
- How can leaders ensure that some land is available for appropriately planned and designed modest growth?
- How can we balance fiscal responsibility with the need for both some growth and protection of resources?

When questions like these are asked regularly, smarter development decisions will be made. What happens today most often is that municipalities will simply let the market react and then approve a development plan without enough foresight and analysis. Some of these questions motivate action when there is no development being proposed but rather when considering the community’s vision for the future of the land.

### **Strategic Resources Protection and Resiliency Goals, Policies, and Action Items**

Several goals, actions, and policies have been created to help local leaders and partners create a resilient community where resources are protected.

Goals are statements of overall vision and intent and which aim to be broad. They serve as categories for action items and policy statements. Action items are specific steps and activities the City of Earlham, its people, and partners should take. Policies are ongoing principles by which the City of Earlham, its people, and partners should adhere when approving new developments or planning future investments.

These goals, policies, and action items were created to further promote the guiding principles of the Earlham Comprehensive Plan.



**Welcoming Community**



**Active Lifestyle**



**Preservation and Culture**



**Resiliency and Maintenance**



**Managed Growth**



**Affordability**

## Resilient Community Vision

*Earlham's resources are protected from premature or unplanned development and the community's rural way of life is preserved while the community grows. The community is resilient to natural and technological hazards.*

### Goal 1

Protect highly productive agricultural areas.

#### Action 1A

Maintain collaboration with Madison and Dallas Counties pertaining to how farmland should be preserved.

#### Action 1B

Create preservation zones in areas identified in the future land use map as agriculture/open space in collaboration with these entities within the planning area.

#### Action 1C

Engage farmers about ideal potential long-term use of farmland that may be sold, so that land is more likely to be available when needed or preserved as long as possible.

#### Action 1D

Promote and encourage existing and possible future agro-tourism sites and businesses in and near the planning area.

#### Action 1E

Promote and celebrate agriculture and multigenerational farm families. Engage them in the affairs of the city if they own land in the planning area.

#### Policy 1A

Consider creating a standard for what farmland should be preserved and where development should be limited/discouraged as long as possible. Link it to the CSR2 or another accepted metric.

#### Policy 1B

Ensure existing residents in the city and planning area "have a say" about when and how land is developed, especially when farmland is converted.

## Policy 1C

As the town nears 1,800 residents, consider a buffer zone to ensure land north and east of town does not physically connect to development in Des Moines (appear like a continuous subdivision).

## Goal 2

Preserve and enhance natural areas, mineral extraction areas, and green spaces.

## Action 2A

Identify areas in town and the planning area where environmentally sensitive lands should be preserved. Map those on the City's mapping system (Chapter 10).

## Action 2B

Create a floodplain and wetland overlay zone or district; consider adding native timberland and other sensitive areas.

## Action 2C

Through polices and funding programs, encourage the planting of appropriate native trees and vegetation on land in the city and planning area.

## Action 2D

Engage owners of gravel mining areas; seek to find the best use for those areas after mining potential is exhausted.

## Policy 2A

Require that new development designs in the city and planning area accommodate and accentuate environmentally sensitive areas.

## Policy 2B

Continually promote the idea that Earlham should be environmentally sustainable – use minimal resources.

## Policy 2C

Use the “prioritizing strategic resources protection” list of questions (Page 11.6) to discuss and analyze development projects and ideas.



## Policy 2D

Create a city policy on wind turbines and solar collectors, both residential scale and industrial/utility scale; engage county governments as the policy impacts the planning area.

## Goal 3

Become increasingly resilient to hazards.

## Action 3A

Continue participation in the five-year countywide hazard mitigation plan. Maintain annual reviews of that plan and ensure that projects are being implemented when possible/feasible. Apply for FEMA/USDA funding.

## Action 3B

Educate the public on hazard issues and challenges that affect the city as a whole.

## Action 3C

Implement a building code and a property maintenance code; establish a means for property inspections and enforcement.

## Action 3D

Promote local businesses and needed new businesses that make Earlham more resilient, such as banks, lumber yards, construction contractors, medial and vet services, etc.

## Action 3E

Revitalize existing neighborhoods per strategies outlined in Chapters 6 and 7. Focus on strengthening buildings and making them more energy efficient.

## Policy 3A

Include sustainable and low-impact design concepts into development planning and revitalization strategies.

## Policy 3B

Promote Earlham as a “self-sustaining” community that can succeed independently from other entities – work toward an Earlham whose future is not dictated by what happens in Des Moines, etc.

## Policy 3C

Discourage development of impermeable surfaces within floodplains or designated stream buffer areas.

## Policy 3D

Preserve wetlands within the planning area and utilize high-quality wetlands as amenity features when possible.

Chapter 13 is the implementation chapter. It includes a matrix that provides strategies to carry out each goal, action, and policy outlined in this chapter. The matrix also outlines the suggested timeframe for each, the guiding principles impacted, and potential partners that should be involved. It also provides tools and resources to help with the implementation process.