

Chapter 5 – Envisioning Earlham:2040

This chapter outlines a comprehensive and collaborative vision for Earlham in 2040. It also includes analysis about this vision and the characteristics of the community that will result from the vision and the community’s work toward it. Finally, it lays out six guiding principles to be used to plan for the future of Earlham.

This vision is created through a combination of the background research and community public input.

Encouraging but Managing Growth

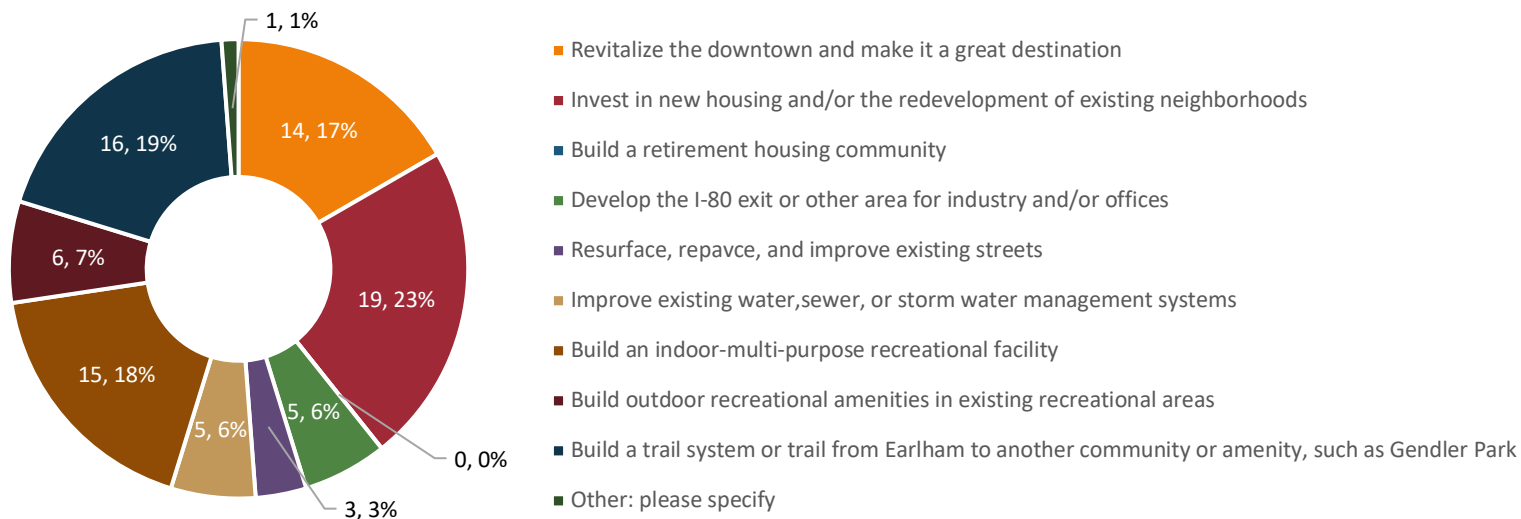
An overriding theme of the early planning sessions was the desire to preserve what is great about Earlham but also to allow growth that will support the school and local businesses as well as the tax base. Growth demand is almost certain, but Earlham will only truly grow when land is made available or density increases. Unfettered growth, however, will lead to problems found in some of the rapidly growing suburbs to the east. Therefore, a vision is cast that encapsulates the sometimes competing demands of growth and preservation of Earlham’s character. Background research also concluded that the city has the means to prosper with the current infrastructure and facilities but cannot support rapid growth.

Public Input

During the planning process, there were several opportunities for members of the public to provide input and be engaged in the plan. Chapter 2 and the Appendix provide details about public engagement. The community survey included some questions pertinent to Earlham in 2040.

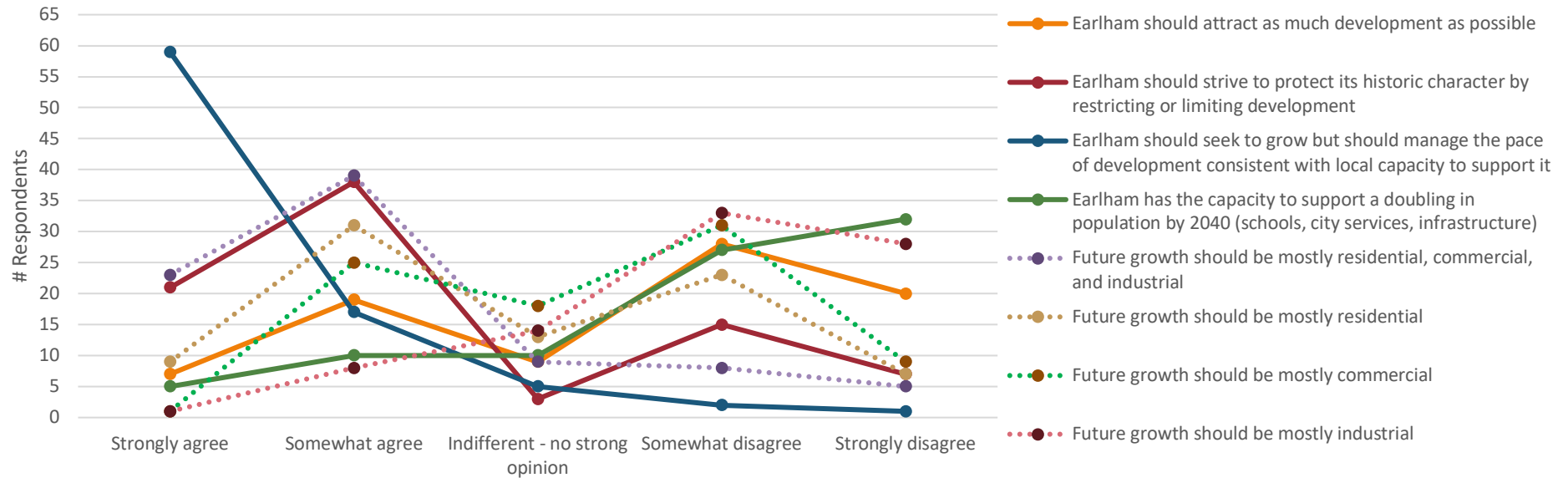
Question 26 of the survey asked, “If Earlham were to issue a \$5 million bond levy and match some grants for a \$10 million project, but it had to be one project that invested in the physical environment of Earlham, what should it be?” Strong interest was found in revitalizing downtown, investing in housing, building an indoor recreational facility, and developing a trail system.

Figure 5.1: One Project Preference Survey Results



Question 31 asked: “Earlham’s location makes it a prime target for future development. Please check how much you agree with the following statements about this future.”

Figure 5.2: Growth and Development Vision



The overwhelming most popular thought was that Earlham should seek to grow but should manage the pace of development consistent with local capacity to support it. People also support balanced growth of all types and protection of its historic character. People are less supportive of industrial development, the thought that Earlham has the capacity to support a doubling of population, and that the city should attract as much development as possible.

Question 35 of the survey asked, “As Earlham and the surrounding area grows, what should stay the same?” The top answers were:

- Small town feel/rural.
- Sense of community/involvement/pride.
- Historic Downtown/district.
- School support.

Question 36 asked, “As Earlham and the surrounding area grows, what should change?” The top answers were:

- More housing/affordable housing/rural and in town, more rental options.
- Park improvements/expansion, improve rec complex.
- Revitalize downtown commercial district, green spaces in downtown.
- More business, retail options, and restaurants.
- More opportunities- activity spaces for youth and families.

Questions 37 asked, “What would make Earlham a better place to live?” The top answers were:

- Trails/a trail from town to Gendler Park, developments of trails around the ponds.
- More local eateries/fast food and family options closer.
- More local businesses/industry; places to work; “if I could work here”.
- More affordable housing generally.
- Improved academic outcomes and competitive athletics and programs.
- An indoor batting cage/recreation complex/training facility.
- New/expanded pool or splash pad.
- Even more community events, more things to do/entertainment (all ages), theatre/community playhouse.
- More things for children to do/places for kids to have options. Recreation options for kids.

The public engagement session in October 2023 was geared around gaining input about Earlham’s future.

One of the questions pertaining to the future was to describe Earlham in 2040 in one word. A word cloud was generated to show that words like sustainable, growth, and growing were common respondent themes.

Figure 5.3: Word Cloud of “Describe Earlham in 2040 in one Word.”



Another question to which a few dozen residents responded was, “What is your one big dream for the future?” The following chart organizes the thoughts by some apparent categories. It is interesting that about 30 comments can be so easily organized this way.

Figure 5.4: Thought Matrix of Resident Dreams for Earlham’s Future

Growth	Restraint	A Fun Place	Home/Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of building lots • Houses north of Casey’s • Housing • Grow more commercial space • More signage or promotion of what we have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain • No huge subdivisions • Stay a small welcoming Iowa town • Balanced growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park and recreational programming • Indoor recreational space • Exceptional lifestyle for all residents • Recreational center • Trails nearby • Amusement park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying morally strong and continuing with a sense of community • Maintaining close community • Generational longevity • Balance of quality of life

Growth	Restraint	A Fun Place	Home/Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vibrant downtown More housing, recreation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor recreational facility Aquatic park, outdoor recreation Trails, aquatic center, and recreation center Bike trails Connection to existing trail system Gendler Park expansion 	

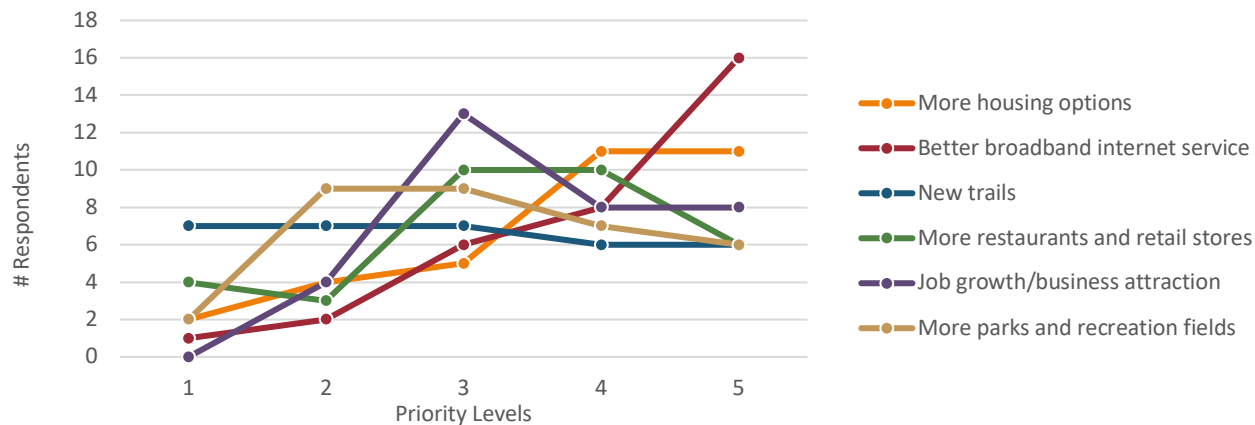
A similar question asked the opposite: “What is your one big fear for the future?” The answers here are also organized by some notable themes.

Figure 5.5: Thought Matrix of Resident Fears for Earlham’s Future

Too Much Growth	Too Much Restraint	Lack of Proper Planning	Loss of Home/Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncontrolled growth, over-development Becoming too large Earlham growing too big Too much and too big of growth Unnecessary growth Unmanaged growth Development blends into Des Moines Excessive growth Rapid growth Going “boom” – large class sizes Too big Economic loss by chain retail and services Too fast growth so we become like Waukee, pricing everyone out of living here with housing costs and property taxes Over-expansion Huge subdivisions/too many “big box” stores Overrun Turning into an Adel or Waukee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No houses north of Casey’s No businesses Not changing with the times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earlham forcing others outside of town to be annexed, raising my taxes Taking farmland from families Government assistance Residential growth outpacing sports services To keep growth from ruining what we have Grow fast without proper infrastructure Rapid growth that the city cannot cope with for school and infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Architecturally unattractive buildings that compete with our current businesses; we have a wonderful grocery store; we have a hardware store well stocked with varied stuff; no Dollar General! Town dies Loss of school, loss of identity Losing the small-town community feel

To gauge what types of growth and development is most desired and what may be less desired, people were asked to rate six different types of projects or developments on a scale of one to five, with one being unimportant and five being highly important. What was interesting is that, while new trails are highly demanded by the public, it was the least important among these options. Broadband and housing options were seen as top priorities. See below.

Figure 5.6: Importance for Earlham in 2040 (1 is low and 5 is high)



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.

- 90% feel very safe walking and biking in Earlham.
- The group is slightly (55% vs. 45%) opposed to the City of Earlham and other groups activity investing in the downtown.
- The group believes moderately (70%/30%) that entryways and corridors are okay like they are.
- The group is slightly (55%/45%) happy with housing choices available.
- 90% feel that Earlham should limit the use of tax abatement and other incentives.
- 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.
- 90% state they are proud of Earlham.
- 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.
- About 75% state that Earlham should focus on maintenance of existing parks and programs instead of developing new ones.

The public input tells us that the residents have many diverging views about the future of the city, but everyone seems to be thinking a lot about the development future of Earlham given the continued westward growth of the Des Moines metro.

Madison County Heart and Soul – Vision Statements

Several vision statements were created through the work of hundreds of Madison County residents, including dozens from Earlam. While this plan is a separate planning process from the Heart and Soul process, and Heart and Soul was countywide, the statements are worth sharing here.

Small-town feel in our Communities

We **value** the **small-town feel** in all our **communities - towns, townships, rural neighborhoods, and subdivisions** - which together **contribute to a sense of identity, pride, and togetherness** that is Madison County



Scenic Beauty of our County

We **treasure** our **scenic countryside** and its **natural beauty** – open spaces, farmland, rolling hills, timberland, vibrant skies, **waterways and wetlands** – which all contribute to our **tranquil environment and peaceful interaction with nature**.



Historic Vibe in our County

We **honor** the **stories of Madison County** told through our **museums, architecture, parks, covered bridges, and famous landmarks** where anyone can go any time and be excited about these places where history was made.



Arts and Culture in our County

We **treasure** the **arts and culture** represented throughout the county as we gather in **local venues** that **welcome participation in live entertainment, fine arts education, artisan craft work and activities, and vibrant social networking** that strengthen our sense of place.



Events and Attractions in our County

We **endorse and support** the **unique community and county-based festivals and celebrations, both traditional and innovative, that connect people, instill community pride, and promote tourism and economic opportunities**.



Community Recreation

We **embrace** the variety of both **individual and group recreational opportunities** provided through our **parks and playgrounds, athletic fields, and outdoor spaces** which encourage an active and healthy lifestyle.



Educational Systems in our County

We **value** our **quality local schools** that **challenge students in a safe learning environment** and provide a **variety of extra-curricular activities** to prepare them for a better future.



Agriculture in our County

We **value** our **agricultural heritage** and **recognize** the **diversity of today's agriculture, which preserve a rural lifestyle and contribute to the local and global food chain**.



Local Economy in our County

We **will continue to invest** in **locally owned businesses, local health and government services, and local industries and agriculture** that underpin small-town living, address economic disparity, value personalized relationships, and make living and working here convenient and desirable.



Community Infrastructure

We seek to **maintain and build** our **county's infrastructure** that provides a) **roads and bridges** for easy access in and out of our neighborhoods, b) **access to reliable digital technology** for stronger connections with the global community, and c) **affordable utilities** to enhance living and economic growth.



Community Conversations and Connections

We **recognize** the **independent spirit and individuality of each community** and **understand** the need for **improved two-way communication and cooperation** among all the governing bodies and residents to **improve the quality of life across the county**.



The Challenge of Balancing Growth and Maintaining Small Town Character

We **endorse moderate, transparent, and balanced growth** that **preserves our small-town rural way of life, strengthens our economic base with better paying jobs, provides local amenities and services, and protects our land and water**.



Based on all the insight shared in this chapter until now, the following is the Earlham:2040 vision statement upon which the remainder of this plan is built.

Vision for Earlham in 2040

Earlham will grow in a sustainable way that enhances its community character of togetherness and that grows a balanced economy that ensures an affordable living.

The original iteration of the vision statement included a population of 1,800, which means that the population will grow by about 20 annually to be on track. This inclusion of an actual population in a vision statement is rare but it makes sense for Earlham, given the trepidation some have about future growth but also a concern that being too opposed to growth will cause the city to be left behind. The decision to remove an actual population is based on the desire to be more flexible as conditions change. The sense of togetherness and making sure a wide variety of quality-of-life amenities are also thoughts coming from the residents. Finally, people are concerned about Earlham being an affordable place to live as regional growth occurs.

Mission Statement to Accomplish This Vision

The City of Earlham will thrive by focusing on the Comprehensive Plan, use it to create five-year strategic plans and capital improvements plans, and use it to update policies accordingly, all while providing the best possible customer service.

A written mission statement is not as common as part of a comprehensive plan. However, it is relevant to focus on how the city will accomplish its vision through daily and ongoing work of City officials and many partners.

Guiding Principles

To assist in the creation of the plan, especially the included goals, policies and action items, a set of guiding principles were identified based on a combination of analysis and public input. In general terms, these are the principles and values that should be the aim of all decision-making in Earlham, and the goals, objectives, actions, and policies outlined in the remaining chapters should be based on at least one of these. Each guiding principle has some associated text to help describe the intent of each and how they relate to Iowa's Smart Planning Principles.



Welcoming Community

Earlham is a welcoming community, where people enjoy socializing and getting to know their neighbors. People value their school and gathering places. Earlham has a hometown feel while yet close to growing urban areas and all the services they provide. Key ISP Principles: community character, collaboration, occupational diversity, housing diversity, and transportation diversity.



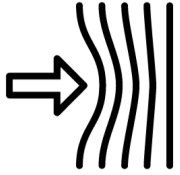
Active Lifestyle

People in town love to walk around town and visit local parks. Gendler Park offers great potential for development into a regional park. Earlham's proximity to the metro trail network is a great asset. Key ISP Principles: community character, sustainable design, and transportation diversity.



Preservation and Culture

Earlham's history is unique, interesting, and preserved through several sites. The downtown has great potential for preservation and revitalization, with the Bricker-Price Block as the catalyst. Earlham has neighborhoods that make people feel at home. Key ISP Principles: community character, revitalization, and natural resources/agricultural protection.



Resiliency and Maintenance

Earlham is committed to resiliency in face of growth, increasing hazard risks, and environmental concerns through investments in infrastructure and a focus on maintaining the quality infrastructure already in place. Key ISP Principles: collaboration, efficiency/transparency/consistency, clean/renewable/efficient energy, revitalization, and sustainable design.



Managed Growth

Earlham is willing to allow and encourage fiscally responsible growth through thoughtful land use planning, the right mix of development, and incentives that are targeted to what is needed in the city. Earlham collaborates with property owners, developers, infrastructure owners, and other governments. Key ISP Principles: collaboration, efficiency/transparency/consistency, clean/renewable/efficient energy, community character, occupational diversity, housing diversity, transportation diversity, and sustainable design.



Affordability

Earlham faces unaffordability due to regional growth. However, the community strives to provide quality affordable places to live and work through thoughtful planning and development policies. Earlham strives for the missing middle and to ensure long-term residents are not subject to gentrification. Key ISP Principles: clean/renewable/efficient energy, community character, occupational diversity, housing diversity, transportation diversity, and sustainable design.