

Morse, Iowa

2011 Village Plan



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Figure 1: Morse Train Depot (1950s)
Source: The University of Iowa Digital Archives

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Introduction

Per the 2008 Johnson County Land Use Plan, the following document has been submitted to the Johnson County Board of Supervisors to act as a guide for future development in the Village of Morse. The Village Plan of Morse is a result of a joint effort between residents and County officials.

The goals of the Village Plan are consistent with the Johnson County Land Use Plan and Village Vision Statement. The plan focuses upon maintaining the high quality of life that residents currently maintain in the Village, while at the same time providing a framework for the future of the community. Specifically, the plan addresses the prevention of future incompatible land uses within the Village and preservation of the historic nature of the Village.

Village Information

History

The Village of Morse was established in the 1850's by brothers Able William Gustavus Morse and Edwin Kenneth Morse. In 1871, E.K. Morse and his wife Mary donated land to the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railroad to establish a depot for local agricultural goods¹. By 1880, Morse had a population of 84 as well as a doctor's clinic, telegraph office, Post Office and the Christian Church with seating for 250².

By the early 20th Century, Morse was a prosperous local hub of economic activity that boasted a lumber yard, brickyard and grain elevator as well as a stockyard for cattle bound to slaughter-houses in Chicago³. Serving local residents was a school, taverns, a hotel and a general store⁴. In 1911 Morse even briefly incorporated with Frank Berenek Sr. serving as the first and only mayor.

The railroad closed the depot in 1961 and tore up the tracks in 1985, but many families remained. By 1986 the population was estimated at approximately 70 people⁵. The Community Club now serves as a neighborhood center and the annual 3rd of July Celebration is a well established community event.

Demographics

According to the 2000 census there were approximately 85 people living in the Morse area. In 2000 there were 34 housing units in the Morse area. The median age in Morse was 39.4 years old compared with the state average of 36.6 years old. Since 2000, 3 homes have received building permits for additions. In the same time frame three new

¹“ Railroads, business abandon Morse, but its families stay” *Daily Iowan* 11/07/1986 P.6S, C.2

² History of Johnson County, Iowa, Containing a History of the County, and its Townships, Cities and Villages from 1836 to 1882. Iowa City, Iowa: 1883 pp 352, 716, 803, 872

³“Railroads, business abandon Morse, but its families stay” *Daily Iowan* 11/07/1986 P.6S, C.2

⁴ McConeghy, Carol “Morse and Oasis, Iowa” *Iowa Press Citizen* 7/30/1988 P 1c, C.1

⁵“Railroads, business abandon Morse, but its families stay” *Daily Iowan* 11/07/1986 P.6S, C.2

homes have been built in Morse. This has increased the population by an estimated (7) seven people.

Infrastructure and Services

There have been five subdivisions and one farmstead split in the Morse area. The most recent subdivision was in 2007. There have been 30 building permits issued in Morse. 13 were for houses, 7 were for additions and 10 were for sheds. Many properties are within the 100-year floodplain of Rapid Creek; especially those near the intersection of Putnam and Morse Roads. Recent flooding has caused damaged to several structures as well as a liquid natural gas storage tank.

Morse is served by the City of Solon Fire Department. The boundary line between the Solon and the West Branch school districts divides Morse. Morse is in the Iowa City postal district and law enforcement is provided by the Johnson County Sheriffs Office. All roads are maintained by the County's Secondary Roads Department.

Planning and Zoning

There are five types of zoning in Morse: R-Residential, CH-Highway Commercial, RUA-Urban Residential, A-Agricultural, and MH-Heavy Industrial. There are 27 Residential and Urban Residential parcels in Morse. Six commercial parcels are located in Morse. The majority of the commercial parcels are located near the intersection of Morse Road and Davey Street. All of these properties are assessed for residential use. To the best of staff's knowledge, these properties were being used for residential purposes prior to the ordinance change in 2004, making them legal non-conforming uses. Morse also contains a number of parcels zoned Agricultural.

Public Meeting Process

Meeting One

The first public meeting in the Village of Morse planning process was on July 28, 2010. County planning staff in attendance included Assistant Planning and Zoning Administrator R.J. Moore, Assistant Planner Josh Busard, and Planning and Zoning Intern Andy Kass. About thirty village residents attended the meeting.

The meeting began with introductions and an explanation of the village planning process. Preliminary questions were raised by audience members and answered by staff. After the introductions and initial questions, the attendees were asked to split up into small groups to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Morse. County staff was available for questions and suggestions during this process. The strengths and weaknesses list can be seen in Appendix B.

Lastly, residents broke into small groups and began formulating the vision statement.

Meeting Two

Meeting two was held on August 25, 2010. Assistant Planning and Zoning Administrator R.J. Moore led the discussion. During the first part of the meeting, residents spent time continuing to formulate a Village Vision Statement for Morse. Planning and Zoning staff presented example Village Vision Statements that incorporated the core values of the community. The Village Vision Statement can be seen in the next section.

After spending time formulating the vision statement, residents next created goal statements. Goal statements are specific policies that residents would like to see implemented in the village. All goal statements were in accordance with the vision statement.

The village boundary was the last item of discussion. Residents discussed the boundary in small groups and drew maps where they felt the boundary should be. The village boundary can be seen in Appendix C.

Meeting Three

Meeting three was held on September 29, 2010. Assistant Planner Josh Busard led the discussion. Staff presented revised goal statements and a draft of the plan. Residents questions, comments, and concerns were discussed. Much of the discussion was focused on the village boundary. A new village boundary was proposed by residents during the village boundary discussion. A vote was taken for which boundary residents prefer after discussion of the boundary ended.

Residents were reminded about the public hearing process that village plans have to go through before they can be adopted. Staff also encouraged residents' to attend these public hearing to voice any concerns they may have.

Vision Statement

The vision statement for the Village of Morse was created using public input during the second meeting and is shown below. The Vision Statement encompasses the core values of the Village and should be the basis of future decisions making for the village.

Morse is a community which is family-friendly, safe, naturally beautiful, and is committed to growing responsibly.

Goal Statements

The following goal statements are recommended for adoption by the Board of Supervisors. All goal statements are consistent with the Village of Morse Vision Statement.

Quality of Life

1. Appropriate open spaces should be identified and preserved for the enjoyment of residents.
2. Property owners are encouraged to maintain property in a manner consistent with the Morse Vision Statement.
3. The community should continue to support the Community Club and the 3rd of July celebration

Growth

4. Future housing stock should not conflict with historic development.
5. Shared well and wastewater systems shall be preferred.
6. Clustered developments shall be the preferred type of residential development.

Infrastructure and Services

7. The condition of the roads should be improved.
8. Additional safety measures should be provided at the intersection of Morse Road and Highway 1.
9. The community should support the provision of natural gas utilities.
10. An emergency warning system should be developed and implemented.

Appendix A

Johnson County Land Use Plan – Village Excerpt

The Johnson County Land Use Plan outlines its policies for Unincorporated Villages and the creation of village-area development plans. The following is an excerpt from the Land Use Plan which is available on the Johnson County Planning and Zoning website:

3. Unincorporated Villages (Page 15)

3.1 Create village-area plans which will detail a vision for the desired level of growth and development to occur in the future. As part of the village-planning process, the County should:

- a) Develop geographical growth areas for villages.
- b) Consider the resultant impacts of additional development within floodplains and to other environmentally sensitive areas.
- c) Encourage sustainability within villages by promoting mixed-use developments that foster live/work arrangements which are appropriate for the village-area being considered.
- d) Clustered subdivision design shall be the preferred type of residential development style within the village areas.
- e) Zoning classifications within the village areas shall be at a density that is appropriate and consistent with existing and historical patterns. The preferred zoning classes for residential development would be those with the highest densities.

Appendix B

Meeting One: Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

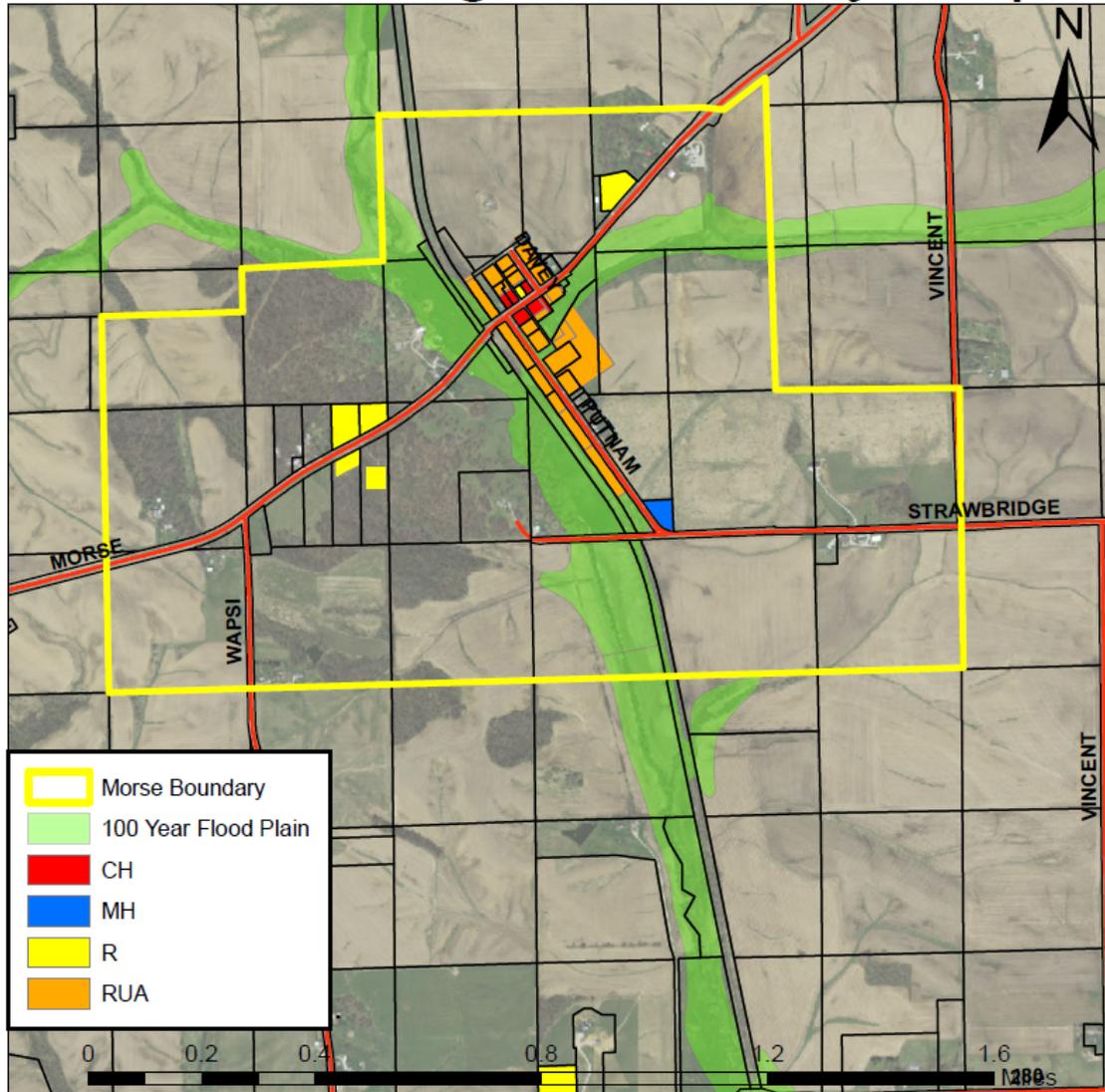
Proximity to Iowa City, Solon, and Corridor
Excellent Emergency Services
Communication services are improving
Good road maintenance in the winter time
Private, quiet, and quaint
Morse Community Center
Close knit neighborhoods
Surrounded by nature and agriculture
Unchanging nature
No hog confinements
No apartment buildings

Weaknesses:

Un-kept yards and homes
Minor flooding
Failing septic systems
Utilities (Natural Gas)
Lack of developable land around the village
Questionable water quality
Lack of official parkland
Lack of dry fire hydrants
Lack of an emergency siren
Lack of a streetlight at intersection of Morse Road and Highway 1
Road and bridge conditions (potholes and general maintenance)
Davey Street needs to be paved
Chip seal the road to the south
Speed limit on Morse Road
No designated parking areas for the annual 3rd of July celebration

Appendix C

Morse Village Boundary Map



RESOLUTION 03-10-11-Z4

RESOLUTION APPROVING THE MORSE VILLAGE PLAN AS AN APPENDIX TO THE 2008 JOHNSON COUNTY LAND USE PLAN

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors finds that the Morse Village Plan is intended to supplement the 2008 Johnson County Land Use Plan specifically regarding future growth in Morse and the surrounding area; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors finds that it is in the public interest to adopt said Morse Village Plan as an appendix to the 2008 Johnson County Land Use Plan.

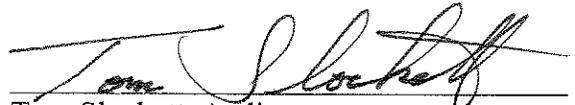
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE JOHNSON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, that the following Morse Village Plan, copies of which can be obtained at the Johnson County Planning and Zoning Office, Johnson County Auditor's Office, or at www.johnson-county.com, is hereby adopted as an appendix to the Johnson County Land Use Plan.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Morse Village Plan shall become effective as an Appendix to the Land Use Plan upon adoption of this Resolution.

On a motion by Sullivan, and seconded by Neuzil, passed and approved the 10th day of March, 2011.

AYES:	NAYS:	ABSENT:	ABSTAIN:	
<u>✓</u>	_____	_____	_____	Harney
<u>✓</u>	_____	_____	_____	Neuzil
<u>✓</u>	_____	_____	_____	Rettig
<u>✓</u>	_____	_____	_____	Sullivan
<u>✓</u>	_____	_____	_____	Stutsman


Pat Harney, Chairperson
Johnson County Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:

Tom Slockett, Auditor
Johnson County, Iowa