

Johnson County Poor Farm Update

Adopted by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors
_____, 2012

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2012 UPDATE TO THE JOHNSON COUNTY POOR FARM PLAN

Since 2003, there have been several development projects on the County property commonly and historically known as the *Poor Farm*:

- Construction of the Joint Emergency Communications Center south of Chatham Oaks
- Construction of the National Guard Facility, on the north side of Melrose Ave, east of the Secondary Roads Department
- Construction of two Melrose Ridge residential buildings, east of Chatham Oaks
- Construction of the Johnson County SEATS facility, on the Secondary Roads site

These developments, and proposals for additional residential care facilities on the property, have prompted the desire for an update to the 2003 plan to ensure there is adequate space on the property to accommodate the desired uses, to ensure the historic Poor Farm structures and cemetery are preserved, and to ensure the continued viability of the property as an agricultural resource and open space.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

The historic resources section of the Poor Farm consists of historic structures on approximately 15 acres of property in the northwest corner of the site (south of Melrose Ave), and the associated cemetery near the center of the property. The 2003 Plan states that the County Poor Farm buildings should be preserved in 'some manner' and that there is a great deal of variation in what form this might take. Due to development and development proposals on the larger Poor Farm property, it is apparent that there should be further definition regarding the steps to take to preserve the historic resources on the property:

1. Information for a potential National Register of Historic Places applications should be prepared for the Poor Farm buildings and approximate 22 acres of associated property, and the cemetery. The 2004 architectural survey should be used as a guide. The Johnson County Historic Preservation Commission (with assistance from the Johnson County Historical Society) should take the lead in preparing this application. This work could be partially funded through a Certified Local Government (CLG) Historic Preservation grant*, or a Historic Resource Development Program (HRDP) grant**. Technical assistance should be sought from the State Technical Assistance Network (TAN)***.
 - a. Listing in the National Register is a way for historic properties to be recognized and advertised as historically significant areas.
 - b. Owners of listed properties are eligible for federal historic preservation funding.
 - c. National Register properties are under no obligation to restore or maintain the property *unless* federal permits or funding are sought, in which case restoration and maintenance would be a requirement of the funding.
2. Through the process of preparing the application, an assessment of the historic structures should be completed. It is recommended the County Facilities Manager review the immediate needs of the Poor Farm buildings for structural stability. Technical assistance should be sought from the State Technical Assistance Network (TAN).
3. A phased plan for restoration of the structures should be completed, with the most historically significant buildings targeted initially. Grants should be sought for building restoration. If local matching funds are required, Historic Preservation Commission should request matching funds from the Board of Supervisors.
4. Based on information gathered in items #1-3 above, the Johnson County Historic Preservation Commission (with assistance from the Johnson County Historical Society) should prepare a plan for interpretive signs for the historic resources on the property, and seek grant funds for fabrication of the signs.

*CLG grants are used for activities related to the identification and evaluation of potential historic buildings. CLG funds may cover up to 60% of costs; local volunteer labor may qualify for the local match (40%) requirement. More information is available at <http://www.iowahistory.org/historic-preservation/local-preservation/assets/2012-grant-manual.pdf>

**HRDP grants can generally be used for preservation, interpretation, documentation and development of historic resources. HRDP funds may cover up to 50% of costs, with at least 25% of the local match being cash (the remaining 25% may be cash or in-kind labor). More information is available at <http://www.iowahistory.org/historic-preservation/local-preservation/assets/2012-grant-manual.pdf>

***TAN assistance is available to provide technical assistance to potential applicants for an HRDP grant, to assess buildings and properties. TAN advisors assess the site and provide guidance. This assistance is free-of-charge, though the County may be responsible for travel, meals and lodging of the advisors.

RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

The property contains several residential facilities designed as care facilities for persons with mental illness, including Chatham Oaks and Melrose Ridge apartments. There is a proposal to add between two and four additional apartments associated with Melrose Ridge, to the east and southeast of the Joint Emergency Communications Center (JECC).

1. County staff should be assured that the proposed residential structures do not conflict with other uses of the property, including JECC, the historic resources on the property, and the continued viability of the property for agricultural production.
2. A potential sub-acute care facility on approximately two acres of property west of JECC is proposed. County staff should be assured that the proposed facility will not conflict with other uses on the property.
3. If there is any question about the structures and/or uses conflicting with the historic resources on the property, the National Register for Historic Places application should be completed and the boundaries of the historic resources on the property should be clearly defined.
4. Future residential care or residential non-care facilities on the property may be proposed. Figures 1 & 2 identify general potential areas for future residential development; these areas are meant to be general and/or flexible based on the proximity of street infrastructure, and may be modified at the time specific development is proposed. These proposals should be considered in the context of:
 - a. Access and capacity of public transit
 - b. On-site facilities (medical, food service, counseling) able to meet the demand of the population
 - c. Walkability (for non-care facilities) to adjacent neighborhoods and parks
 - d. Water and sewer capacity
 - e. Ability of JECC to operate without conflicts
 - f. Adequate on-site parking
 - g. Available funding for services
 - h. General community needs
 - i. Compatibility (scale of structures, noise and light, traffic impact, etc.) with other uses on the site

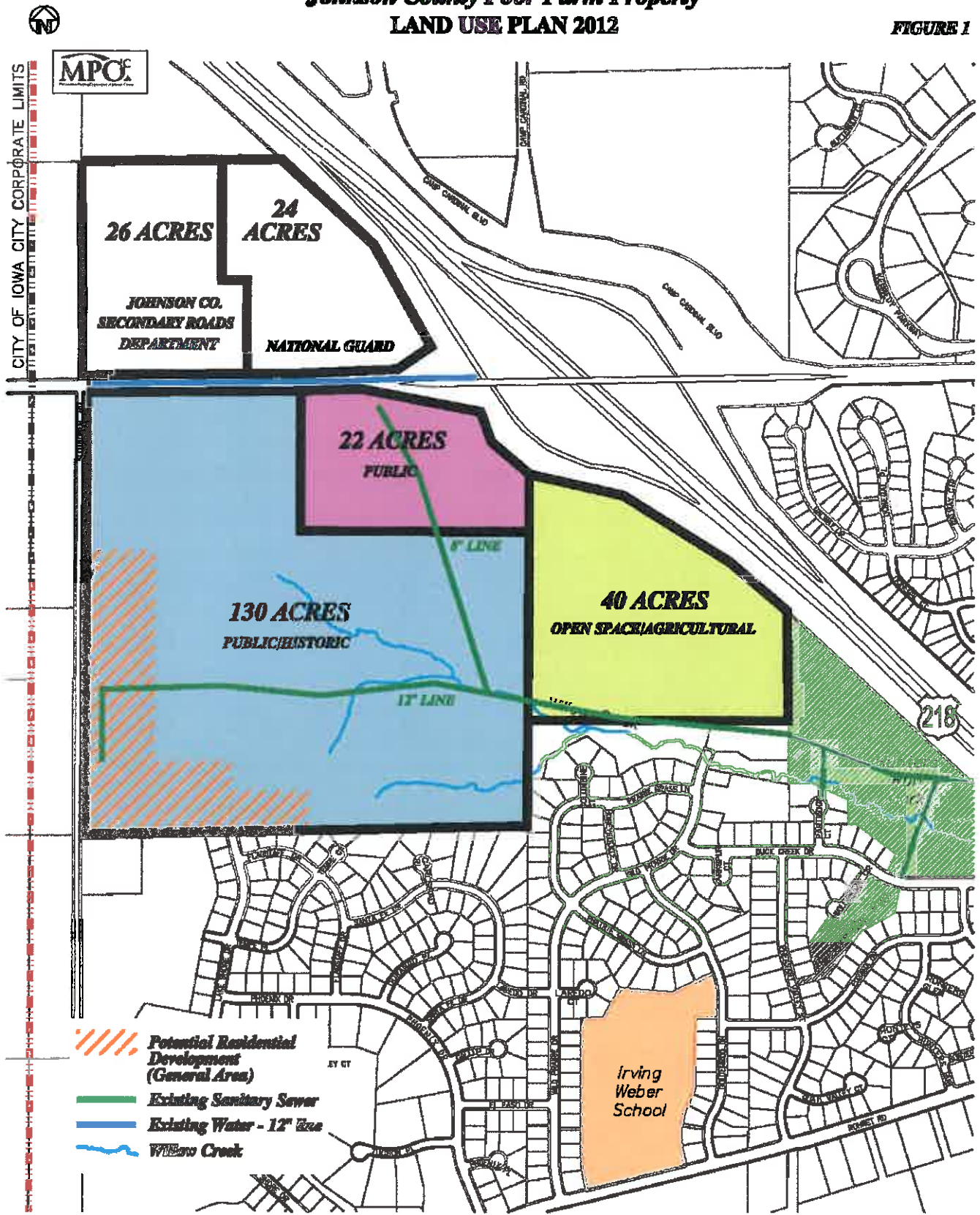
OPEN SPACE AND AGRICULTURE

The majority of the property is utilized as agricultural production, and agricultural production will continue to be emphasized for the foreseeable future. Consistent with the 2003 Plan, there is a long-term goal of the property transitioning to a regional park with trail connections. The uses of agriculture and a regional park are not mutually exclusive.

1. In the foreseeable future, the portions of the property used for agricultural production will remain in agricultural production.
2. Future proposals to develop residential subdivisions on portions of the Poor Farm will be considered for property with access to Slothower Road and abutting residential streets to the south. Residential development proposals will be considered in the context of preserving a majority of the property for agricultural production and a future regional park. Residential development may be considered generally in the areas identified on Figures 1 & 2; these figures are intended to depict general areas of potential residential development while retaining a majority of the property for agricultural production.
3. There is a longer-term goal of constructing trails from the residential areas to the south on the Poor Farm property, to connect with Melrose Avenue and/or Slothower Road.
 - a. Trails should be prioritized along the creek tributaries where they will not conflict with agricultural production
 - b. Trails need not be paved. Consistent with trails in other area regional parks, limestone or woodchip trails are appropriate
 - c. Trails should connect with the historic resources on the property, and be planned to connect with the interpretive signs planned for the property
4. In the near term, neither the City of Iowa City nor the County Conservation Department is able to accommodate maintenance of the area as a regional park. Trails should be planned to be low-maintenance facilities. Any trails require some maintenance including occasional mowing, trimming of vegetation and repair of wash-outs. Prior to trails being constructed, the City of Iowa City or the County Conservation Board should agree to conduct trail maintenance activities.
5. Converting the property to a regional park should remain the long term goal, and should be revisited as Iowa City residential subdivisions begin to surround the south and west sides of the property. Due to sanitary sewer limitations in the area for continued residential growth, it is not expected there will be significant residential growth in the near future.

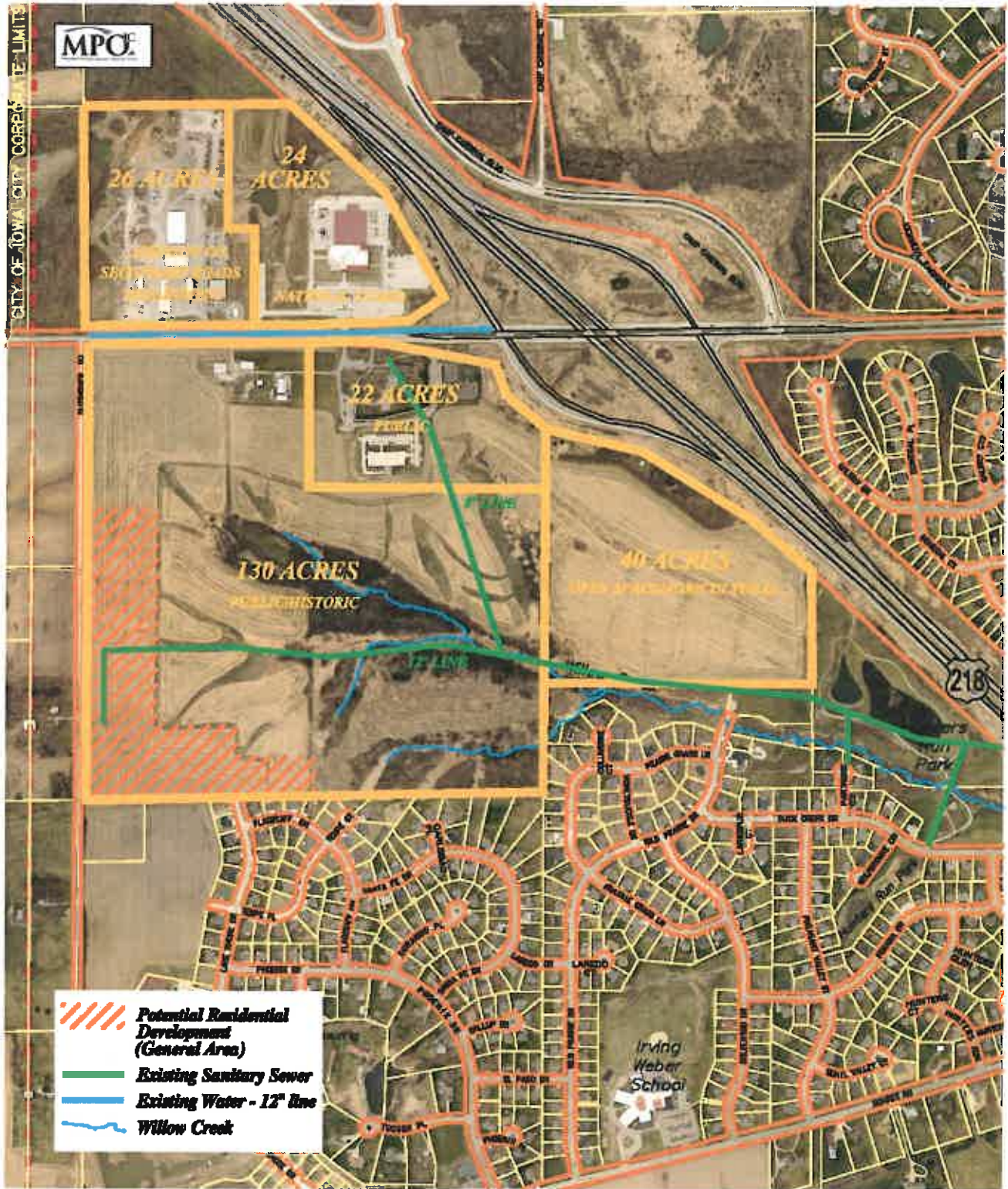
**Johnson County Poor Farm Property
LAND USE PLAN 2012**

FIGURE 1



Johnson County Poor Farm Property
LAND USE PLAN 2012
Aerial View

FIGURE 2



Participants in committee discussions of the 2012 Johnson County Poor Farm Plan Update:

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