



# IN THE Corridor

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## THE NORTH IOWA CORRIDOR TAKES ACTION ON HOUSING NEEDS AS A KEY ECONOMIC PRIORITY

**A NEW NON-PROFIT CORPORATION HAS BEEN FORMED IN MASON CITY** to address the area's significant need for housing.

The North Iowa Housing Development Corporation is an off-shoot of the existing North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Corporation. Chad Schreck, president and CEO of the Corridor, said the new group is one of the first actions to come out of a recent study and survey conducted to find out people's thoughts on housing needs and wants.

"North Iowa Corridor focuses more directly on business, but housing becomes an important component of that," he said. "Businesses could contribute and invest funds through the new corporation, so they don't have to work directly on housing. It's a cool public-private partnership opportunity."

The North Iowa Housing Development Corp. answers the question of who will take the lead and carry out the action plan developed following the survey. It also can serve as the applicant for public grant opportunities addressing housing needs.

"The big thing is just the need - a significant need for housing," Schreck said. Lack of affordable housing affects current residents, as well as the opportunities for growth and the employment picture for businesses.

The Mason City Housing Initiative report was prepared with McClure's Community Development consulting team to help local leaders understand the current need and future demands on housing availability. It examines the area's demographics; includes public input on a housing survey; outlines the challenges; and proposes strategies to encourage housing development here.

Study of the city's demographics "identified affordability as one of the top challenges Mason City homebuyers and renters face in attaining newly constructed housing units," according to the report. Public input on the survey voiced issues including frustration with shortage of rentals, lack of available contractors, a desire for a greater mix of housing types, and high demand for senior housing options.

In addition to affordability, the study examines future demand and development opportunity as challenges facing Mason City. It identifies likely areas for development, both new construction and revitalization of existing housing.

The report comes up with a "Call to Action: Housing Development Strategy and Best Practices." The primary goal is to "expand the inventory of quality, attainable housing units."

### Strategies outlined to enact this goal include:

1. Increase diversity of housing options.
2. Residential improvements should follow infrastructure improvements.
3. Further expand code enforcement to clean neighborhoods.
4. Target new development of affordable/workforce units on infill lots (vacant lots in existing neighborhoods).
5. Need to expand/attract availability of contractors. For instance, by expanding NIACC's Building Trades Certificate program, offering incentives for local contractors, and garnering support of community groups with vested interest in growing the availability of labor.
6. Create community development corporation to fill the gap in affordable housing development.
7. Seek alternative incentives to support the development of workforce housing, such as Iowa's existing Workforce Housing Tax Credits.
8. Review/update city ordinance to allow for cottage courts and tiny housing, where necessary.
9. Seek ways to revise city review process and permit fees.

"We've already jumped on the new corporation," Schreck noted. "We've also submitted a grant application to the Iowa Economic Development Authority for a project at the old YWCA building to convert 10 apartment units."

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