



QUALITY OF LIFE PROJECTS TAKE ACTION

A RECENT INCREASE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS for North Iowa will benefit current and prospective residents. "Our communities are really on the move," said Chad Schreck, President & CEO of North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Corporation. "It ties back to the Vision North Iowa plan developed about five years ago. Those discussions made it clear that local businesses and citizens wanted to see more amenities and housing. With planning and input, we're now seeing great progress. We've been working to make it happen, and these are the results."

Schreck said he's appreciative of city and county leadership for making all these decisions, which involved lots of time and investment. In October 2022, Mason City and Cerro Gordo County were awarded \$4.5 million towards a large-scale plan to improve outdoor recreation here. The funds came from the Destination Iowa grant program through the Iowa Economic Development Corporation (IEDA). Gov. Kim Reynolds earmarked \$100 million from the federal American Rescue Plan Act for "transformational" projects to encourage tourism and boost the quality of life in the state.

Officials worked with members of North Iowa Human Powered Trails and Mason City Activity Living and Transportation Commission to develop the Bike North Iowa plan, which aims to make this region a biking tourism destination. Proposed improvements include construction of more single track trails; a bike park and pump track for mountain biking; connections between existing city and county trails; trailside amenities; and improvements to a rural campground on the Prairieland Trail. The total plan is estimated to cost almost \$12 million over the next two years.

The City of Clear Lake is expecting to hear before the end of the year whether it secured its own Destination Iowa grant, with a Surf District redevelopment plan to capitalize on the tourism draw of the Surf Ballroom and the lake.

The list of other current and ongoing development projects in the area continues:

- Groundbreaking took place recently on "River II," a second Talon Development housing project adding 93 units in downtown Mason City. Schreck said Talon's first complex here has been at or near-capacity since opening in 2020. Residents typically include young professionals, employees of city businesses, and older people who have downsized housing, according to Schreck.
- DEV Partners is working with the city on a new 11-unit row home project on an empty lot at the corner of N. Federal and 2nd St NW, and received an IEDA Workforce Housing Tax Credits in September.
- Renovations are creating upper-story apartments in downtown areas, including above Simply Nourished and Edward Jones Investments in Mason City and above Charlie's Soda Fountain in Clear Lake.
- Groundbreaking for the "Everybody Plays" playground was held in Clear Lake this fall, to construct an accessible, all-inclusive park for families.
- Groundwork is underway at Emerald Edge, a development near Interstate 35 in Clear Lake that will include housing around a new Hy-Vee grocery and gas station.
- Ridge Development is building 8 twin homes and 16 single-family houses on property just north of Clear Lake State Park.
- Mason City is moving forward on a RiverWalk along Willow Creek, connecting east and west sides of town, after receiving several state and private grants.
- Footings are going in for a new terminal building at Mason City Airport.
- Clear Lake's new Wellness Center and Mason City Schools' addition of a field house and natatorium in the past year add to the area's amenities.

"As people look at communities to decide where to live, people want recreational amenities, they want a high quality of life," Schreck said. "Every person lives someplace for a different reason, but this is what most people look for, at a bare minimum. And they need options in housing types. We need all types, because people want to be able to choose."

An update of the Vision North Iowa county-wide comprehensive plan has begun, and opportunities for public input will be provided with initial public workshops December 7th and 8th.

"We know businesses need help with recruiting. Our communities have great quality of life and low cost of living, and are committed to continuing to improve it. And to keep people here, we also need good schools, government, and businesses. We're proud of the collaboration our organizations and communities have built up, and are excited by the results."

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