



# Strategic Plan

April 2025

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# THANK YOU

The West Branch Public Library's Strategic Plan was made possible using input from the library board of trustees, staff members, and community stakeholders.

## Library Board of Trustees

- Lizabeth Osborne, President
- Seth Goodspeed, Vice President, County Representative
- Annika Pettitt, Secretary
- Lisa Kofoed
- Deb Kauffman-Watson
- Erin Monaghan
- Holly Wasion

## Library Staff

- Jessica Schafer, Library Director
- Kat Korsmo, Public Services Librarian
- Mary Buol, Programming Librarian

## City Staff and Community Members

- Adam Kofoed
- Heidi Van Auken
- Madison Conley
- Adrienne Howard
- Kathy Fait
- John Fuller

## Facilitator

- Becky Heil

# MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement of the West Branch Public Library is as follows:

**The West Branch Public Library provides resources and opportunities for all people and groups in the community to connect, learn, and celebrate diversity.**

The Mission Statement of the library is the primary goal of the library. All goals and objectives provided here within try to meet and ensure success of the mission.

# BACKGROUND AND DATA

The West Branch Public Library's Strategic Plan is created to guide the library staff and board of trustees in what direction the library should be headed. It describes the correlation between community interests and library services and provides a measurable timeline for meeting its goals and objectives.

The plan is required by the State of Iowa in conjunction with the state's library accreditation process. The requirement states that the library has a written plan not to exceed 5 years into the future. It must outline the library's goals and objectives to meet the community's needs. It must also be reviewed annually.

The library began the strategic planning process in early 2024. The library director and staff researched recent census data, attended meetings with city leaders and business owners, and analyzed library usage and circulation trends. In-depth focus group discussions were held less than five years ago, prior to the 2021 Strategic Plan, and the responses from these sessions were also considered.

In October 2024, Becky Heil of the State Library of Iowa facilitated a community input session with the library board and staff, and stakeholders were invited from throughout the community.

Some highlights from that community planning session are included below.

### **Changes in the Library**

- Due to changing priorities in the city, the library budget was reduced by \$30,000 last year. One full-time position was cut from the library, and open hours were reduced.
- Visits and computer usage have been increasing since reopening after COVID.
- No on-staff IT person.
- Reference questions and technology help are going up.
- Attendance at programs has been low; people often say they don't know about programs and scheduling is an issue. There's always something else going on in the community.
- No staff time for beautification projects, building maintenance gets priority.
- The library often has willing volunteers and could work to utilize them better.
- Hearing about staff cuts, some patrons feel like they are a burden to the library and have been looking elsewhere instead of utilizing the library's services. The library needs to deal with the perception of the lack of staff.

### **Changes in the Community**

- Housing issues in West Branch have improved, but more progress is needed.
- Transportation around West Branch and to Iowa City is difficult. There is no public transportation, and the trailer court is a significant distance from downtown.
- Small tax base and other financial limitations are still an issue.
- There are increasing divisions in the community, especially regarding longstanding families vs those who have recently moved into the area; Us vs. Them mentality.
- It is still hard to get involved in the community.
- There is a general lack of social inclusion, especially for new residents.
- Social media could be better utilized throughout the community.
- Organizations need to make connections and foster partnerships.
  - The library could work with Main Street West Branch since they have some programs in place like welcome bags for new residents.
- The Voices of West Branch Facebook group has a wide reach and could be used as an avenue for outreach.
- It seems like the best way to connect with citizens is to reach out directly.

### **Demographic changes**

Becky highlighted a few of the demographic trends found in the ISU document "Data for Decision Makers."

- Between 2010 and 2020 the population of West Branch increased by 8.1%. Cedar County saw a 0% increase in population during the same time period.
- The City of West Branch, compared to Cedar County, had a higher percentage of young people and a lower percentage of older people in 2020.
- The median household income in West Branch is less than the median household income of Cedar County.
- There is a higher percentage of individuals 25 and older with a Bachelor's degree or higher in West Branch compared to Cedar County.
- Families with children tend to have a higher rate of poverty than families without children.
- Poverty rates for female-only households grew from 8% to 38% from 2010-2020.

# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## **Goal 1: Parents and caregivers experiencing poverty will find a sense of community and be supported by having a safe and comfortable space.**

- Objective 1. Between fall 2025 and summer 2026, the Programming Librarian will work with other staff to host 2 programs which are geared toward single parents and provide programming for their children during the adult event.**

As discussed in the community planning session, families with children and especially families with a single female parent tend to experience very high rates of poverty in the community. By offering a program during a time when their children are also participating in a program, we hope to provide an opportunity for single moms (or other caregivers) to interact with fellow members of the community and find some information or enrichment for themselves. Possible programs could include yoga, self-care, cooking, or other light educational classes.

Potential partners include West Branch Parks & Recreation, local yoga instructors, and meditation teachers.

## **Goal 2: The library will partner with other community organizations to provide mutual support and share information about programs and resources that benefit members of the community in need.**

- Objective 1. By October 2025, the library will start a Community Resource Center in the front foyer, containing information and free resources for individuals in need. Most information will be added by May 2026.**

The community bulletin boards are very messy and contain many outdated postings, making it hard for patrons to tell the difference between resources, ads, and events. By separating resources into a specific area, it will make it easier for patrons to find information relevant to their needs. The new area will include wayfinding signage so patrons can maintain privacy when searching for resources.

Potential partners include Main Street West Branch, West Branch Food Pantry, other community aid organizations.

- Objective 2. The library will work to increase attendance at adult programs throughout the next two years by improving signage in public areas around the community.**

It was discussed in our community input session that community members, especially newcomers, don't know about things happening in West Branch. By improving physical signage around town, the library hopes to reach more of these newcomers and inform them about library programs.

Potential partners include the City Office, Main Street West Branch headquarters, churches, post office, Jack & Jill, The Serving Café, Main Street Sweets, and other area businesses that have space for public postings.

- Objective 3. By July 2025, the library will add a “Resources for Seniors” section to the website, highlighting library services, programs, and other resources from**

**around the community that will be of special interest to seniors.**

Currently the website contains specialized pages targeting specific user groups. There is one broad page for adults, but specific pages for children, teens, business owners, remote workers, community groups, and visitors to the area. Adding a page targeting seniors will help increase awareness of our programs.

### **Goal 3: Community members of all ages will be encouraged to connect with others and share diverse areas of interest.**

**Objective 1. The library will host monthly programs geared toward adults and providing a social outlet and chance to explore a variety of new topics each session.**

A repeated theme among community members is a lack of social opportunities in West Branch. This came up in 2021 and again during our discussions with the community in 2024. Besides the restaurants and bars, there aren't many places to go to socialize with friends or new people, and very little without the expectation to spend money. This new, regularly scheduled program will provide opportunity to explore a variety of topics from travel, cooking, and specialized interests, to games and crafts, in a very low-key environment with plenty of time for socializing.

**Objective 2. The programming librarian will work to include sensory elements in storytimes and children's activity areas at least 6 times in 2025 and 6 times in 2026.**

It was mentioned in our community input session that individuals with special needs are often forgotten when planning programs. The library will work to include individuals with sensory needs when planning programs and include sensory activities in storytimes throughout the next two years. The themed activities in the children's area will also include sensory elements.

### **Goal 4: The library will participate in the city-wide strategic planning process.**

**Objective 1. The library will work with city officials and participate in the city-wide strategic planning process as it unfolds in 2025 and 2026.**

The city is in the early stages of working on a new comprehensive plan with the University of Iowa. The library director and staff will follow the process and participate in community input sessions so that the library may be included in the city's visioning. The current library strategic plan will be reassessed when more is known about the city's planning process.

# TIMELINE

| Year | Month     | Objective  |
|------|-----------|--|
| 2025 | January   | Adult Program  |
|      | February  | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
|      | March     | Adult Program  |
|      | April     | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
|      | May       | Adult Program  |
|      | June      | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
|      | July      | <b>Add Resources for Seniors to website</b><br>Adult Program                                   |
|      | August    | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
|      | September | Single parent program held<br>Adult Program  |
|      | October   | <b>Begin Community Resource Center in foyer</b><br>Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program |
|      | November  | <b>Single parent program held</b><br>Adult Program   |
|      | December  | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program<br><b>Participate in citywide planning process</b> |
| 2026 | January   | Adult Program  |
|      | February  | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
|      | March     | Adult Program  |
|      | April     | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
|      | May       | <b>Finish adding information to Community Resource Center</b><br>Adult Program                 |
|      | June      | <b>Single parent program held</b><br>Sensory storytime/activity                                |

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|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
|                  | Adult Program  |
| <b>July</b>      | Adult Program  |
| <b>August</b>    | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
| <b>September</b> | Single parent program held<br>Adult Program  |
| <b>October</b>   | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program  |
| <b>November</b>  | Adult Program  |
| <b>December</b>  | Sensory storytime/activity<br>Adult Program<br><b>Participate in citywide planning process</b> |

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# APPENDIX A

Below you will find some more detailed community input and research based on available statistics on West Branch and Cedar County. Much of this data was discussed in the planning session and utilized in the formation of the objectives.

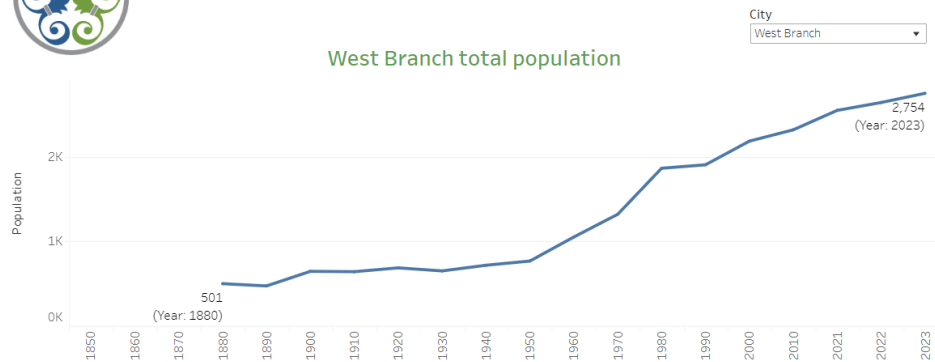
## Demographic Highlights

- Growth:** West Branch has grown and is continuing to grow. There are new developments going up around the city, and they have different income levels. Some of the new construction residences are single-family homes, but there are also duplexes and condos.



### Demographic Characteristics: West Branch, Iowa

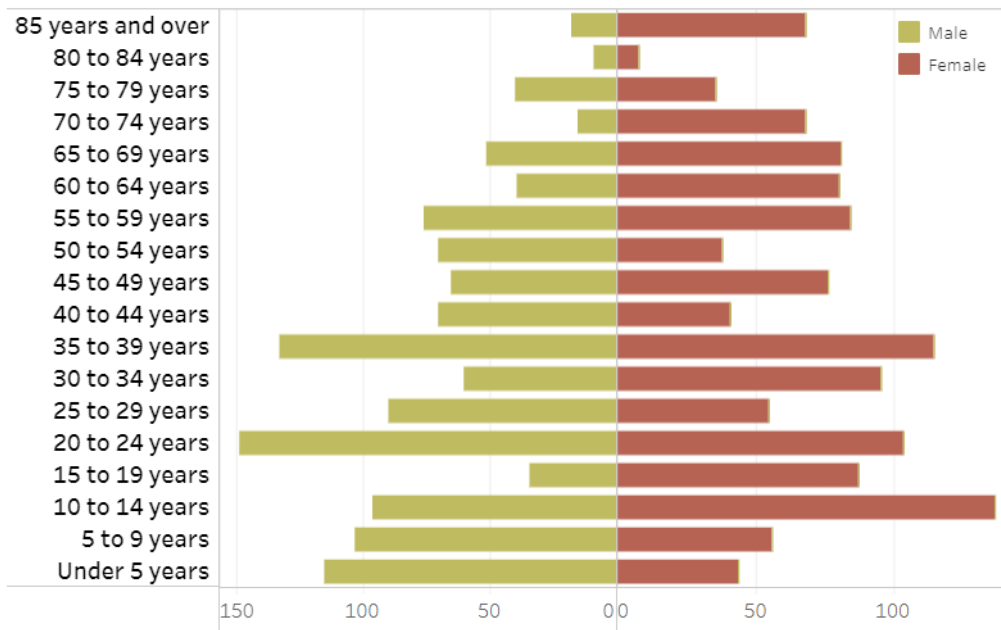
2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year period estimates (unless noted)



1850-2020 Decennial Censuses & 2022 Annual Population Estimates

- Population by age:** There is a fairly even distribution of ages, including many people (especially women) over 60. This reinforces feedback the city has received about more need for senior activities.
  - Veterans:** 7.8% of residents are veterans (6.5% state rate), so that is a group the library may want to continue to consider.

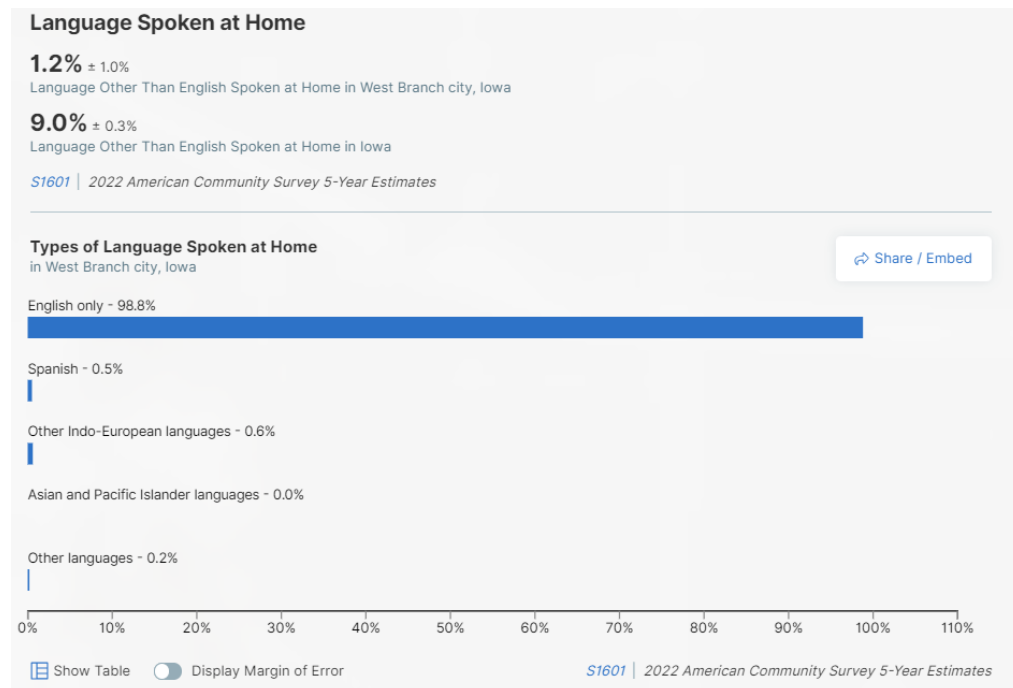
### Population by age and gender



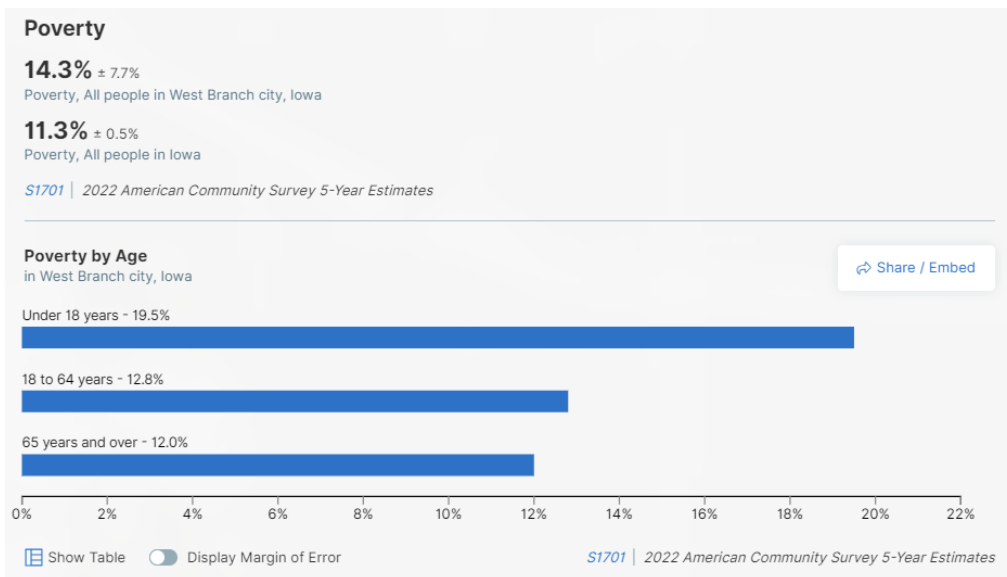
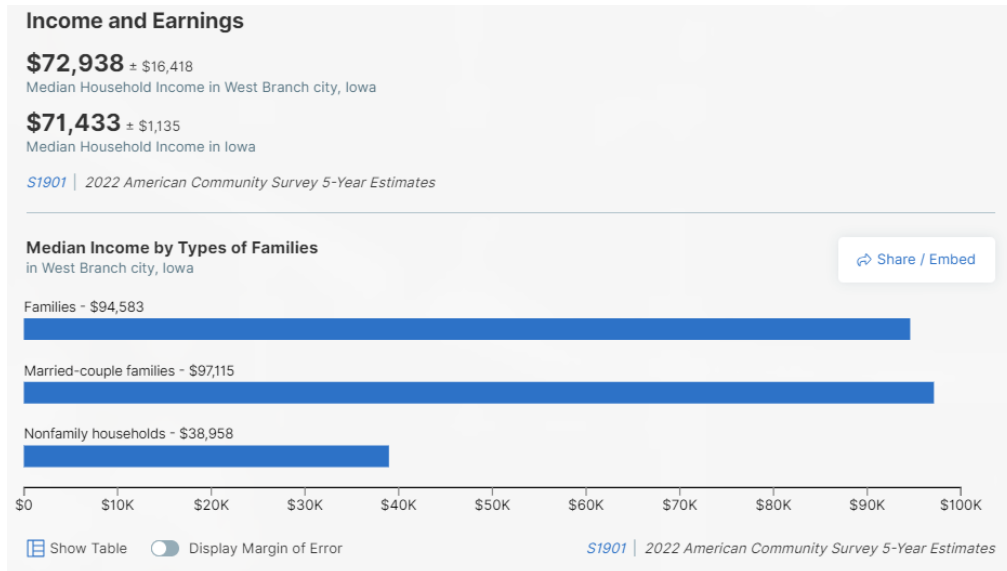
- **Ethnicity:** West Branch is not very diverse. Even compared to Iowa as a whole (which is not a very diverse state), West Branch is not ethnically diverse.
  - **Language spoken at home:** 1.2% of West Branch residents speak a language other than English at home, and Spanish (0.5%) has roughly the same rate as other Indo-European languages (0.6%). It might not be a wise use of funds to duplicate materials in many languages in our collection, because there isn't any usage.
  - That said, West Branch residents do want to embrace cultural diversity. In the 2021 information gathering session, celebrating diversity was identified as one of the goals and continues to receive a lot of support.

## Race and Hispanic Origin

|  | Estimate | Percent |
|--|----------|---------|
| Total population                                 | 2,503    |         |
| White alone                                      | 2,385    | 95.3%   |
| Black or African American alone                  | 27       | 1.1%    |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone          | 0        | 0.0%    |
| Asian alone                                      | 28       | 1.1%    |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone | 0        | 0.0%    |
| Some other race alone                            | 0        | 0.0%    |
| Two or more races                                | 63       | 2.5%    |
| Hispanic or Latino origin                        | 98       | 4.1%    |
| White alone not Hispanic or Latino               | 2,301    | 91.9%   |



- Income:** There are a wide range of income levels in West Branch. While the median income in West Branch is in line with the rest of the state, there is a significant difference between married, two-income families and nonfamily households. Nonfamily households make less than half of a married family household.
  - Poverty:** The poverty level is also higher in West Branch than the rest of the state.
  - The board has already mentioned the income gap in West Branch and ways that the library can serve lower income families.



- Community partners:** Main Street West Branch has a full-time executive director, Parks & Recreation went from 2 staff to none back to full-time director.
  - The library also receives support from the Lions Club and Kiwanis.

# APPENDIX B

The following table was compiled from community interviews conducted in 2021. Many of the points identified are still relevant a few years later.

Within the table, you'll find a listing of main points and sub points within each. The number associated with each item is how many interviews mentioned that point (17 total). A single interview likely gave multiple main points and sub points. If someone listed multiple sub-points within a main point, those sub points were each counted once for that interview, but the main point was only counted once for that interview. In other words, each number is how many interviews total mentioned that point.

**1. What are your wishes or aspirations for the West Branch community? Where would you like us to be in 5, 10, 20 years? If you have a dream of what the community could be, what do you see?**

| Aspirations, Needs, & Wants | Main Point                | Sub Point                        |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 82.35%                      | 14 Main Street/Businesses |                                  |
|                             |                           | 7 Eating/dining - more options   |
|                             |                           | 6 Drug Store/Pharmacy            |
|                             |                           | 5 Grocery Store - improvements   |
|                             |                           | 4 Hardware Store                 |
|                             |                           | 3 Retail                         |
|                             |                           | 2 Entertainment                  |
|                             |                           | 2 Promotion - More               |
|                             |                           | 2 Toy/gift shop                  |
|                             |                           | 1 Accountant                     |
|                             |                           | 1 Antique Store - additional     |
|                             |                           | 1 Attorney                       |
|                             |                           | 1 Bakery                         |
|                             |                           | 1 Bigger Farmer's Market         |
|                             |                           | 1 Clothing Store - additional    |
|                             |                           | 1 Deli/Sandwich                  |
|                             |                           | 1 Destination for out of Towners |
|                             |                           | 1 Growing thriving               |
|                             |                           | 1 Italian Restaurant             |
|                             |                           | 1 Local Owners                   |
|                             |                           | 1 Movie Theater                  |
|                             |                           | 1 Open Regularly                 |
|                             |                           | 1 Outdoor seating                |

|        |           |  |   |   |
|--------|-----------|--|---|---|
|        |           |  | 1 | Owners involved in community                  |
|        |           |  | 1 | Reputation as great place to live             |
|        |           |  | 1 | Revitalization of East Downtown               |
|        |           |  | 1 | Small/Historic Stores                         |
|        |           |  | 1 | Somewhere for kids while parents shop         |
|        |           |  | 1 | Thrift Store                                  |
| 76.47% | <b>13</b> | <b>Growth</b>                              |   |   |
|        |           |  | 4 | More interactivity of people moving in        |
|        |           |  | 4 | Younger families                              |
|        |           |  | 3 | More Families                                 |
|        |           |  | 3 | Mix of age groups                             |
|        |           |  | 2 | Larger Tax Base                               |
|        |           |  | 1 | Has to be sustainable                         |
|        |           |  | 1 | Planning for it                               |
| 52.94% | <b>9</b>  | <b>Splash Pad/Pool</b>                     |   |   |
| 41.18% | <b>7</b>  | <b>Housing</b>                             |   |   |
|        |           |  | 6 | Affordable                                    |
|        |           |  | 3 | Apartment/Condo Style                         |
| 35.29% | <b>6</b>  | <b>Rec Center</b>                          |   |   |
|        |           |  | 1 | Ability to use School Facilities without cost |
|        |           |  | 1 | Combined with new Library                     |
| 29.41% | <b>5</b>  | <b>Social Events (not bar)</b>             |   |   |
| 29.41% | <b>5</b>  | <b>Trails</b>                              |   |   |
|        |           |  | 3 | More Trails                                   |
|        |           |  | 2 | Interconnected trails                         |
|        |           |  | 2 | Nature Trail - longer/continuance             |
|        |           |  | 1 | Hard surface trails - not gravel              |
|        |           |  | 1 | Kids w/o license cant get to Casey's now      |
|        |           |  | 1 | Parks connected                               |
|        |           |  | 1 | Riding Trails                                 |
| 17.65% | <b>3</b>  | <b>Assisted Living</b>                     |   |   |
| 11.76% | <b>2</b>  | <b>Library Expansion</b>                   |   |   |
|        | <b>2</b>  | <b>More collaboration between entities</b> |   |   |
|        | <b>2</b>  | <b>Small town Charm</b>                    |   |   |
|        | <b>2</b>  | <b>Streets</b>                             |   |   |

|       |   |  |   |  |
|-------|---|--|---|--|
|       |   |  | 1 | Better Street Conditions                   |
|       |   |  | 1 | Improved County Line Road                  |
| 5.88% | 1 | Ambulance Service In Town                              |   |  |
|       | 1 | Communication - need better methods                    |   |  |
|       | 1 | Community Building - Meeting, Seniors, Meals on Wheels |   |  |
|       | 1 | Dog Park   |   |  |
|       | 1 | Downtown Infrastructure                                |   |  |
|       |   |  | 1 | More investment in the downtown            |
|       |   |  | 1 | More physical changes from CDG involvement |
|       |   |  | 1 | Streetscaping                              |
|       | 1 | Expanded Mentality - not small town                    |   |  |
|       | 1 | Expanded Food Pantry                                   |   |  |
|       | 1 | Food Support for Kids                                  |   |  |
|       | 1 | More connectedness                                     |   |  |
|       | 1 | More Diversity   |   |  |
|       | 1 | Pocket Parks   |   |  |
|       | 1 | Public/Private Partnerships                            |   |  |
|       | 1 | Sidewalks  |   |  |
|       | 1 | Truck Route through Town not in Downtown               |   |  |

**2. Thinking about those wishes or aspirations for the community, what do you think the community has - strengths and opportunities - to make those dreams come true?**

| Strengths / Opportunities | Main Point | Sub Point             |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 70.59%                    | 12 Schools |                       |
|                           |            | 7 New Investment good |
|                           |            | 2 Good Size           |
|                           |            | 1 In-house daycare    |

|        |           |   |  |
|--------|-----------|---|--|
|        |           |   | 1 Pre-K program                          |
| 58.82% | <b>10</b> | <b>Local Businesses</b>                       |  |
|        |           |   | 5 Good Stores Currently                  |
|        |           |   | 2 Available Space                        |
|        |           |   | 1 Balanced history with modern amenities |
|        |           |   | 1 Close together and distinct            |
|        |           |   | 1 Defined Downtown                       |
|        |           |   | 1 Owners with ties to the community      |
|        |           |   | 1 Support one another                    |
|        |           |   | 1 Young business owners                  |
|        | <b>10</b> | <b>Small Town Charm</b>                       |  |
|        |           |   | 4 Can ask for help and receive it        |
|        |           |   | 4 Know Your neighbors                    |
|        |           |   | 2 Safe                                   |
|        |           |   | 1 Included in events                     |
|        |           |   | 1 Interconnect jobs and community        |
| 47.06% | <b>8</b>  | <b>Organizations</b>                          |  |
|        |           |   | 4 Fire Department                        |
|        |           |   | 3 Local Service Groups                   |
|        | <b>8</b>  | <b>National Park/Presidential Library</b>     |  |
|        |           |   | 1 Brings Others In                       |
|        |           |   | 1 Federal funding for local jobs         |
|        |           |   | 1 Renovation will bring people in        |
| 41.18% | <b>7</b>  | <b>Public Library</b>                         |  |
|        |           |   | 1 Library Meeting Space                  |
|        |           |   | 1 Programming                            |
| 35.29% | <b>6</b>  | <b>Growth</b>                                 |  |
|        |           |   | 5 Potential for Growth                   |
| 29.41% | <b>5</b>  | <b>Proximity to Iowa City/Corridor</b>        |  |
| 23.53% | <b>4</b>  | <b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b>                 |  |
|        |           |   | 1 Parks                                  |
|        |           |   | 1 Pickleball                             |
| 17.65% | <b>3</b>  | <b>Historic</b>                               |  |
| 11.76% | <b>2</b>  | <b>Activities for Youth - Soccer/Baseball</b> |  |

|       |   |   |                           |
|-------|---|---|---------------------------|
|       | 2 Churches  |   |                           |
|       | 2 Community Events - Christmas Past, Hoover's Hometown Days |   |                           |
|       | 2 I-80  |   |                           |
| 5.88% | 1 Physical Downtown Organization                            |   |                           |
|       |   | 1 | Close and comfortable     |
|       |   | 1 | No major traffic          |
|       | 1 Golf Course   |   |                           |
|       | 1 Hoover Nature Trail                                       |   |                           |
|       | 1 Many Volunteers   |   |                           |
|       | 1 Scattergood   |   |                           |
|       |   | 1 | Brings in new families    |
|       |   | 1 | Community uses facilities |
|       | 1 Town Hall   |   |                           |

**3. Now on the opposite side, what weaknesses, challenges, or threats does the community have to consider or overcome to make those wishes, aspirations, and dreams come true.**

| Weaknesses/<br>Threats | Main Point                 | Sub Point |  |
|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|--|
| 52.94%                 | 9 Small/Old Town Mentality |           |  |
|                        |                            | 6         | Won't accept change, growth                    |
|                        |                            | 2         | People don't want to spend money for change    |
|                        |                            | 2         | Sometimes not inclusive of new people          |
|                        |                            | 1         | Entities do things separately                  |
|                        |                            | 1         | Growth too fast for some                       |
|                        |                            | 1         | No place for groups to come together           |
|                        |                            | 1         | Too particular in what we want                 |
| 47.06%                 | 8 Businesses               |           |  |
|                        |                            | 4         | More - quantity/types                          |
|                        |                            | 3         | Expensive to maintain historic buildings       |
|                        |                            | 3         | Hard to generate sales                         |
|                        |                            | 2         | Too close to other options (IC or Quad Cities) |
|                        |                            | 1         | Amazon hurt small business                     |

|        |   |   |   |
|--------|---|---|---|
|        |   |   | 1 Greater Involvement   |
|        |   |   | 1 Open Storefronts  |
|        |   |   | 1 Taxes turn away some businesses                             |
| 35.29% | <b>6 Housing</b>                              |   |   |
|        |   | 3 | High cost   |
|        |   | 1 | On outskirts of town - don't keep people downtown             |
|        |   | 1 | Some have poor upkeep   |
|        |   | 1 | Streets too small   |
| 23.53% | <b>4 Diversity</b>                            |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | Promote/Celebrate diversity/holidays                          |
|        | <b>4 Too small of tax base</b>                |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | All improvements will cost money                              |
|        |   | 1 | Finances too stressed   |
|        |   | 1 | Have to plan shared resources                                 |
| 17.65% | <b>3 Resident characteristics</b>             |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | Less involvement from younger/new residents                   |
|        |   | 1 | Hard to find volunteers/active members                        |
|        |   | 1 | Internal Disagreements  |
|        |   | 1 | Less connection with commuters                                |
|        |   | 1 | No large donors   |
|        | <b>3 Trails</b>                               |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | Developments don't have to add trailways                      |
|        |   | 1 | Nature trail connections difficult                            |
|        |   | 1 | Not connected to other trail system                           |
| 11.76% | <b>2 Creek Flooding</b>                       |   |   |
|        | <b>2 Lack of Jobs</b>                         |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | Have to drive into IC/CR for many jobs                        |
|        |   | 1 | Need something to draw and keep people in town during the day |
|        | <b>2 Pandemic</b>                             |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | People don't need to go to work anymore                       |
|        | <b>2 Restriction in physical area of town</b> |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | I-80 hard boundary  |
|        | <b>2 Streets</b>                              |   |   |
|        |   | 1 | Constricting framework  |
|        |   | 1 | Poor Conditions   |

|       |   |  |  |  |
|-------|---|--|--|--|
| 5.88% | 1 | <b>Aging infrastructure</b>                        |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Better Method for Communication</b>             |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Changes in Health Care - might lose clinic</b>  |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Current TIF Situation</b>                       |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Johnson/Cedar Boundary problematic</b>          |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Lack of large wealth/donors</b>                 |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Noise from I-80</b>                             |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>More traffic through National Park</b>          |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Others don't realize how close to IC we are</b> |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Out of town building owners</b>                 |  |  |
|       | 1 | <b>Plan for how community develops</b>             |  |  |