

## CHAPTER 8: INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION



Photos above by Randy Uhl

### 8.1 Introduction

Intergovernmental cooperation involves working with neighboring communities, school districts and agencies to understand how their future planning and development activity may impact the City of Decorah and vice versa. At a minimum, this should involve sharing information about the City of Decorah plan with neighboring communities and agencies sharing their plans and initiatives with the City of Decorah.

### 8.2 Adjacent Governmental Units

The City of Decorah and Winneshiek County have collaborated and continue to cooperate on several undertakings. Decorah cooperates with nearby towns, school districts, state agencies and regional agencies and will continue to do so.

### 8.3 Intergovernmental Comprehensive Planning Process

All 8 incorporated communities in the county, as well as Winneshiek County, passed a resolution entering into an intergovernmental agreement for the purpose of developing and updating comprehensive plans.

### 8.4 Agreements with Neighboring or Overlapping Jurisdictions

The City of Decorah has formal agreements with neighboring or overlapping jurisdictions and will continue to encourage these whenever they are mutually beneficial. One example is the City/County 28E agreement with Winneshiek County where the wastewater from the Freeport district is treated by the Decorah wastewater treatment facility. Another example is the 28E agreement with Winneshiek County, Decorah School District, Luther College, Winneshiek Medical Center and Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission to form “Metro Net” to develop a fiber optic network in the city.

## **8.5 Intergovernmental Cooperation Summary**

The City of Decorah has a history of collaboration with Winneshiek County, the surrounding municipalities, and other entities. Future collaboration should be encouraged and strengthened, as this increases efficient use of resources.

## **8.6 Intergovernmental Cooperation Policies**

- The coordination of urban development in the immediate planning area adjoining the city limits with Winneshiek County should be encouraged and supported.
- Coordination and cooperative efforts should be maintained with Winneshiek County, to control and encourage preservation of agricultural land not needed for urban development.
- Coordination and cooperative efforts should be maintained with Winneshiek County regarding annexation of areas required for controlled development and growth of the city.

## CHAPTER 9: LAND USE



Photo by Randy Uhl



Photo by decorahnews.com

### 9.1 Introduction

This element provides an examination of the existing land use pattern and development requirements and a proposed future land use scenario in the City of Decorah.

This update of the Future Land Use Plan Element of the 1990 Decorah Comprehensive Plan has been prepared to assist Decorah in guiding activities for improving the city, as well as to assist in accommodating new growth and development. A primary purpose of the Future Land Use Plan Element is to insure protection of existing conforming uses and future development from encroachment by incompatible uses. This protection benefits residents, landowners, developers and investors alike.

The Future Land Use Plan Element outlines the principles and performance standards to be followed for the control and distribution of land development intensity and population densities. Existing land uses are evaluated, and the proposed distribution, location, and extent of future land uses are designated. The principles and standards for implementing the Future Land Use Plan are specifically defined in the city's land development regulations; the zoning code and subdivision regulations. The land development regulations are the foremost means of implementing the guidelines in the Decorah Comprehensive Plan and controlling the uses of land in the city.

### 9.2 Land Use Issues

Decorah's location nestled in the bluff lands of Northeast Iowa and the Iowa River that flows through the city makes land use somewhat limited. As Decorah continues to grow it will need to identify areas to expand while dealing with the environmental constraints that make this community a beautiful place to live and visit.

### 9.3 Existing Land Use Inventory

The existing land use of Decorah is illustrated in Figure 15 as well as Table 42. The largest existing land use category in the city is agriculture. It comprises over 1,673 acres, or 37.8 percent, of the city’s land area. After agriculture uses, the next largest categories, by area, are commercial uses, residential uses, industrial uses, and unknown which includes uses such as right of way or streets, city land use, religious uses, and any other non-taxable use.

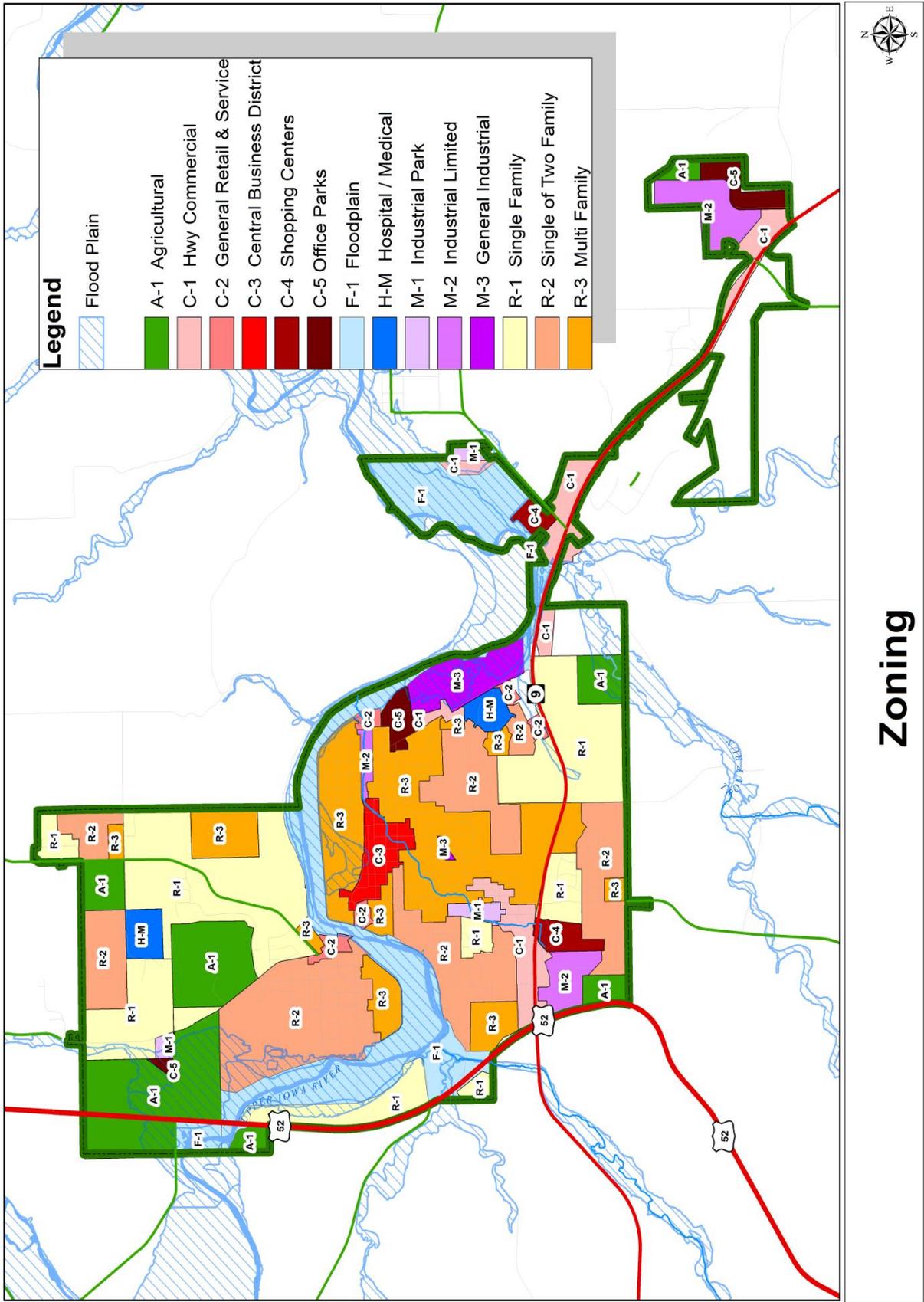
**Table 42: Land Use Acreages**

Land Use	Acreage	Percent
Agricultural	1,673	37.8
Commercial	1,081	24.0
Industrial	52	1.8
Residential	1,026	23.2
Unknown	585	13.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,417</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Winneshiek County GIS/Assessor

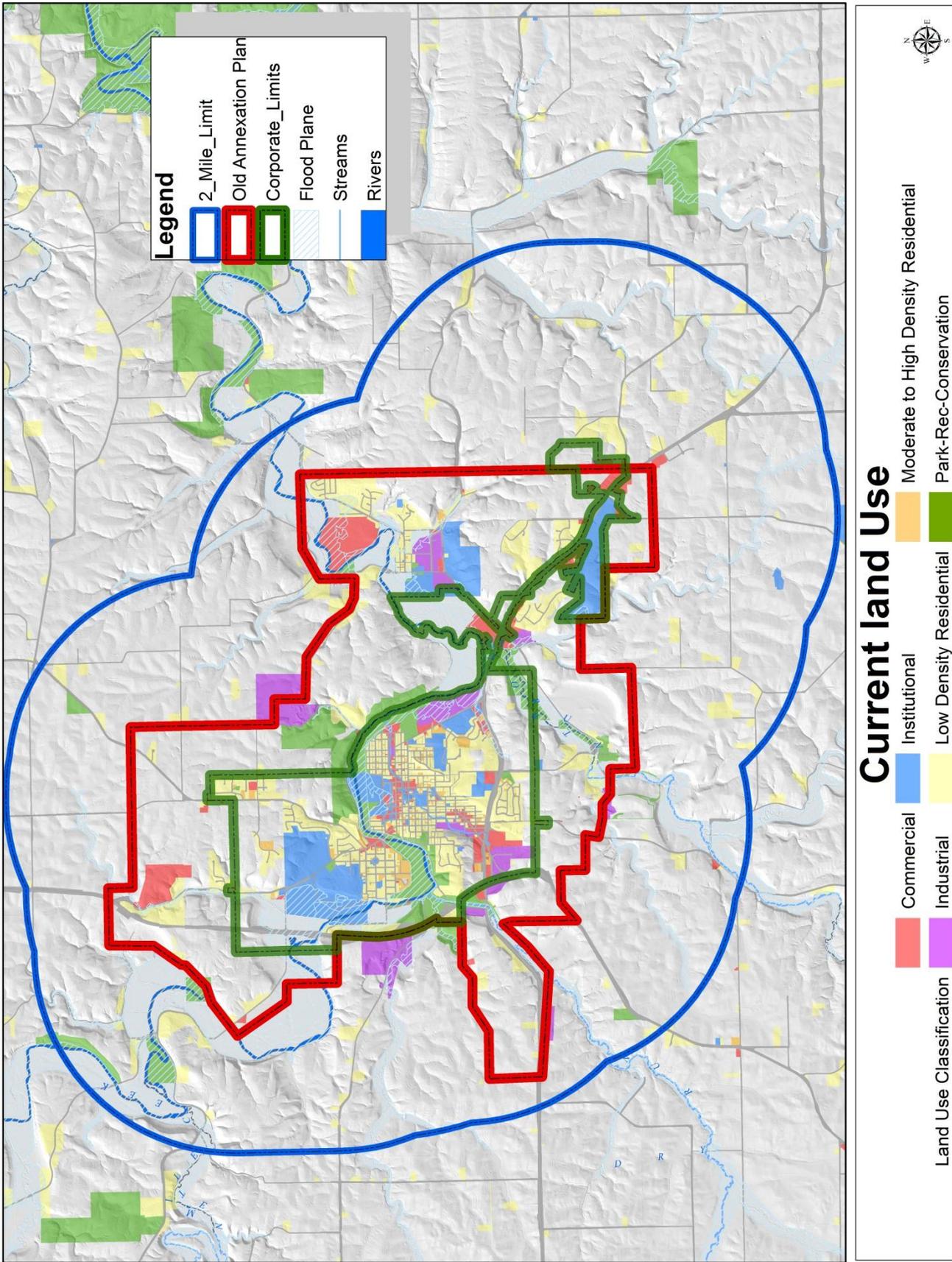
Within those areas classified as non-agricultural uses, the largest land use, by area, is the commercial classification. Commercial uses consist of 24.5 percent or 1,081 acres of the 4,417 total acres that make up the City of Decorah. Residential use is slightly less than commercial use in terms of acreage as it currently encompasses 1,026 acres or 23.2 percent of total acreage. “Unknown use” which includes any non-taxed land uses is 585 acres or 13.2 percent of total land use. Industrial use is the smallest of the city’s land use and compromises 1.8 percent or 52 acres.

Figure 13: Zoning



Zoning

Figure 14: Current Land Use



## 9.4 Land Use and Development Requirements

The City of Decorah's Municipal Code addresses land use and development requirements in detail. The Code is available to the public and can be viewed on-line at <http://www.decorahia.org/code/AABANNER%20-%20Banner%20Page.HTM>

The primary chapters of the Municipal Code related to land use and development requirements include the Zoning Code and the Subdivision Code.

## 9.5 Future Land Use

In addition to the land use goals, objectives, and policies, the City of Decorah utilizes a Future Land Use Map to guide future growth and development. The Map, as provided in Figure 16, offers a graphical view of anticipated, potential, or future land use development for the entire community. General descriptions of the land use classifications shown on the Future Land Use Map are as follows:

### **COMMERCIAL**

#### RSC – Retail Service Commercial

(C-2) Neighborhood convenience and service centers providing limited commercial, personal and professional services

#### HC- Highway Commercial

(C-1) Commercial business oriented to accommodate both the local consumer and the automobile-traveling public

#### OPC – Office Park Commercial

(C-5) Professional and business offices compatible with established residential areas

### **INDUSTRIAL**

#### LI- Light Industrial

(M-1) Manufacturing, industrial and warehousing uses with structures generally one or two stories in height, large lots, landscaped grounds and ample provision for off-street parking and loading spaces

#### LDI- Limited Industrial

(M-2) Developments of medium industrial nature

#### GI- General Industrial

(M-3) Heavy industrial with few restrictions on use

## **RESIDENTIAL**

### **LDR- R 1 Low Density Residential**

(R-1) Low density developments of single-family detached homes

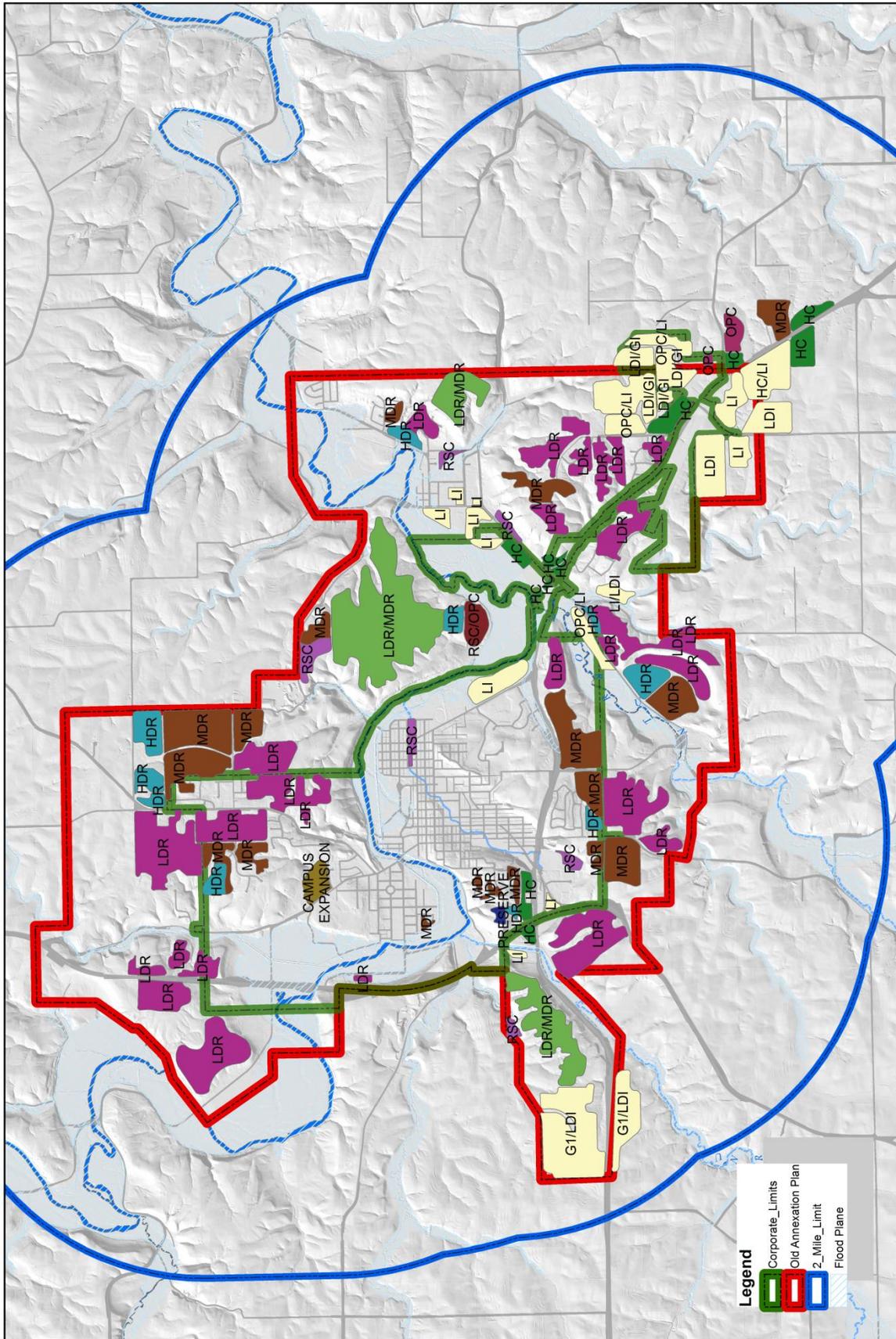
### **MDR- R 2 Medium Density Residential**

(R-2) Medium density developments of buildings with 2-4 dwelling units per structure

### **HDR- R 3 High Density Residential**

(R-3) High density developments of more than 4 dwelling units per structure

Figure 15: Future Land Use



Future Land Use

## 9.6 Land Use Summary

The City of Decorah's Land Use is driven in many ways by the Upper Iowa River and the limestone bluffs. This is both a constraint and an opportunity, because while the steep terrain and floodplains cause limitations for development, those same constraints also help ensure that open space and natural areas remain intact. The challenge for the City of Decorah is to identify appropriate locations for expansion that have access to public utilities, are at lower risk for flooding, have appropriate soils and terrain, and do not encroach on areas of dense tree coverage or high CSR ratings.

As the City of Decorah continues to plan for growth it must consider the cost that accompanies it. City amenities will need to be extended, land will need to be developed, and infrastructure may need to be expanded. Care should be taken that the cost of these expansions and extensions is balanced with the funds to offset the costs incurred.

## 9.7 Land Use Policies

- Solar access rights and energy conservation are encouraged in the review process of subdivision plats and site plans.
- Preservation of wetlands in accordance with state and federal regulations will be implemented in the review process of subdivision plats and site plans.
- Tree replacement and preservation guidelines should be improved and incorporated in the subdivision and site plan ordinances.
- Future land use needs will be developed based on a population estimate of 15,000 by the year 2020.
- Controlled urban development will be encouraged to extend outward from developed area to insure the orderly growth of Decorah.
- Coordination and cooperative efforts will be maintained with Winneshiek County to control development outside and encourage it to occur in the city.
- The voluntary annexation process should be encouraged to the extent possible. Consideration should be given to involuntary annexation of certain areas with potential for development, and to enhance orderly development and compatible land use as expressed through the policies and land-use plan.
- Areas within the two-mile limit with potential for urban development should be considered for annexation to the city during the planning period.
- City-owned land such should be considered for annexation to the city.

- Large bulk commercial uses, and general highway related service uses, should be encouraged to locate along Highway 9, in the Decorah Business Park, and in Freeport in areas suitable for that type of development. Unless planned, commercial and industrial development along Highway 52 should be discouraged to protect conservation of open spaces and retain the visual aesthetics of this gateway entrance and corridor into the community.
- Additional site plan standards and regulations should be adopted and enforced, as part of the zoning, including a defined gateway ordinance, to improve visual quality of commercial development and redevelopment, traffic circulation, and compatibility with adjoining land uses.
- To minimize congestion and improve traffic movements, cluster commercial development should be encouraged, in lieu of strip development, along major streets.
- Development of light industrial uses within planned industrial parks should be encouraged and promoted.
- All residential and certain commercial land uses should be prohibited from areas that are set aside for future industrial development.
- Development of planned industrial parks should be encouraged in areas suitable for industrial development.
- Buffers in the form of natural barriers of streams and wooded areas, landscaping and screening should be provided when industrial uses adjoin residential and other incompatible uses.
- An ordinance defining mixed use and sustainable development should be encouraged.
- Density of residential development should be related to the physical characteristics of the area, including topography and soils, and the availability of municipal utilities. The following densities are considered to meet these criteria:

Areas that are served by municipal sanitary sewer and water systems or the equivalent:

Low Density:	6-8 persons per gross acre 3-4 housing units per gross acre Typical net lot size- 10,000 square feet
Medium Density:	8-12 persons per gross acre 4-6 housing units per gross acre Typical net lot size- 8,000 square feet
High Density:	14-32 persons per gross acre

7-16 housing units per gross acre  
Typical net lot size- 4,500 square feet

Areas that are served by the municipal water system only:

Low Density: 4 – 6 persons per gross acre  
2 – 3 housing units per gross acre  
Typical net lot size – 18,000 square feet

Areas that are not served by municipal utility systems or the equivalent:

Low Density: 2 – 4 persons per gross acre  
1 – 2 housing units per gross acre  
Typical net lot size – 22,000 square feet

Areas that are designated for agricultural use, residential reserve & acreage development:

Low Density: 2 persons per 10 gross acres  
1 unit per 10 gross acres  
Typical net lot size – 10 acres

- Residential development, such as a planned unit development (PUD), should be encouraged to provide flexibility and better utilization and preservation of land; particularly in areas where soils, topography and tree cover are limiting factors.
- Development of vacant land within the existing and future corporate limits will have a high priority in meeting future land-use demand.
- Potential historic and archaeological sites should be identified in the development and redevelopment of publicly and privately owned land and structures. Standards should be provided in subdivision regulations and site plan regulations that require the identification of the historical or archaeological potential of sites and structures.
- The Decorah Historic Preservation Commission should be consulted for consideration and integration of historic preservation opportunities in Decorah.