Baxter Comprehensive Plan

2026-2046

MIPA

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UNITED STATES ARMY

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Introduction 3

Plan Process 4

Vision & Core Values 5

Baxter's Organizations 6

Past Plans 7

Community Profile 9

Housing 12

Transportation & Utilities 19

Economic Development 24

Volunteers & Community Facilities 29

Agriculture, Natural Resources, & Hazards 34

Land Use 37

Implementation 41

Executive Summary

The Baxter Comprehensive Plan establishes a shared vision to guide the community's growth, investment, and decision-making over the next 10 to 20 years. Developed through extensive public engagement, the plan reflects the priorities, values, and aspirations of residents, business owners, community organizations, and local leaders. Through a survey, community events, and stakeholder meetings, residents consistently identified Baxter's small-town character, strong school district, welcoming community, and sense of safety as the qualities they value most.

The plan recognizes that Baxter is well-positioned for continued growth. Recent population trends, increasing housing demand, an active volunteer base, and strong community organizations provide a solid foundation for the future. At the same time, residents expressed a desire to address key challenges, including aging infrastructure, limited housing choices, business attraction, downtown vitality, sidewalk connectivity, and opportunities for recreation and community gathering.

Community input shaped the following vision:

Baxter is a welcoming, safe, and connected small town where strong schools, engaged residents, and hometown pride create an exceptional quality of life. We honor our small-town feel while embracing smart, sustainable growth through thoughtful infrastructure investments, intentional support for local businesses, construction of quality housing, and the creation of a walkable community. Guided by transparent leadership, coordinated partnerships, and a commitment to empowering every generation, Baxter is a community where families, businesses, and visitors choose to grow, belong, and thrive.

To achieve this vision, the plan is built upon four core values:

- Communication & Transparency
- Action Through Partnership
- Empowering All Learners
- Growing Together

The implementation strategy focuses on practical actions that can be achieved through partnerships across the community. Major themes include investing in infrastructure, expanding housing opportunities, supporting existing businesses while attracting new ones, improving downtown and trailhead amenities, enhancing parks and recreation, encouraging volunteerism and community leadership, and coordinating efforts among local organizations. The plan also emphasizes annual review of implementation progress so priorities remain responsive to changing community needs. A summary of the actions related to Baxter's core values can be found on the next page.

Ultimately, this Comprehensive Plan is more than a planning document—it is a roadmap for collaboration. Successful implementation will depend on continued leadership from the City of Baxter, Baxter Economic Development Corporation (BEDCO), the Chamber of Commerce, the Baxter School District, community organizations, local businesses, volunteers, and residents. By working together and building upon the community's existing strengths, Baxter can preserve the qualities that make it unique while creating new opportunities for future generations.

Core Value	Implementation Priority	What it Captures	Example Actions
Communication & Transparency	Keep residents informed & engaged	Make information accessible, communicate decisions clearly, and create meaningful opportunities for residents to participate.	Regular City updates; ordinances on City website; education on utility rates and taxes; Coffee with a Councilor; "get involved" newsletter; welcome class for new residents
Action Through Partnership	Work together to complete agreed upon actions	Coordinate the efforts of the City, the school district, businesses, organizations, and residents around shared priorities.	Quarterly coordination meetings; advisory members on organization boards; business incubator; trailhead improvements; Visioning Report projects
Empowering All Learners	Build opportunities for people of all ages	Support education, lifelong learning, youth engagement, and opportunities for people of all ages to learn, participate, lead, and contribute.	Provide students with a list of volunteer opportunities; career fair; youth involvement in local government; "get involved" newsletter
Growing Together	Invest in Baxter's future	Strengthen housing, infrastructure, businesses, recreation, and community amenities in ways that support Baxter's long-term growth.	Vacant building ordinance; endowment fund; public art; Capital Improvements Plan; mixed housing development on BEDCO land; gridded streets
All Core Values	Turn the plan into ongoing action	Maintain accountability, track progress, and adapt priorities as conditions and community needs change.	Annual review at coordination meetings; assign lead organizations; prioritize actions; develop metrics; continue PDSA cycle

This document helps community leaders make informed decisions, establish priorities, and coordinate efforts that advance the community's shared vision. Leaders should use the comprehensive plan in the following ways:

- The City Council should use the plan to guide policy decisions, annual budgeting, capital improvement planning, and consideration of development proposals.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission should rely on the plan when reviewing rezonings, subdivisions, site plans, and amendments to development regulations to ensure future growth aligns with the community's long-term vision and future land use plan.
- Community organizations are encouraged to use the plan to identify opportunities for collaboration, prioritize initiatives, pursue grant funding, and coordinate projects that strengthen the community.

Introduction

Purpose

A comprehensive plan is a long-range strategy used by cities and counties intended to guide future growth, development, and community decision-making over the next 10 to 20 years. It is an expression of the community's shared vision for the future and provides a framework for how a community should grow, develop, preserve resources, and invest in infrastructure and public services to achieve that vision. The comprehensive planning process helps communities identify goals, address challenges, and develop actions for a range of topics. As both a policy guide and vision document, a comprehensive plan helps ensure that decisions made today support a safe, sustainable, efficient, and desirable community for future generations.

Smart Planning Principles[1]

Iowa Code §18B.1, signed into law in 2010, outlines ten smart planning principles that may be applied during planning, zoning, development, and resource management decisions. These principles were applied throughout the Baxter Comprehensive Plan planning process: collaboration; efficiency, transparency, and consistency; clean, renewable, and efficient energy; occupational diversity; revitalization; housing diversity; community character; natural resources and agricultural protection; sustainable design; transportation diversity.

Using the Plan

This document helps community leaders make informed decisions about land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, parks, and public services. It should be used by the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, City staff, and community organizations to inform decisions, establish priorities, and coordinate efforts that advance the community's shared vision. As opportunities and challenges arise, leaders should refer to the plan to ensure projects, policies, and investments are consistent with the goals and values established through the public engagement process.

- The City Council should use the plan to guide policy decisions, annual budgeting, capital improvement planning, and consideration of development proposals.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission should rely on the plan when reviewing rezonings, subdivisions, site plans, and amendments to development regulations to ensure future growth aligns with the community's long-term vision.
- Community organizations—including the Baxter Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, school district, civic organizations, and local businesses—are encouraged to use the plan to identify opportunities for collaboration, prioritize initiatives, pursue grant funding, and coordinate projects that strengthen the community. Because many of the strategies outlined in this plan extend beyond the responsibilities of the City alone, successful implementation will depend on strong partnerships and a shared commitment to achieving Baxter's vision for the future.

Plan Process

Engagement

Public engagement is at the core of this Comprehensive Plan. The feedback shared by residents, workers, and visitors of Baxter built the plan and informed the assets, needs, and actions of each section. Engagement was a coordinated effort led by the Mid Iowa Planning Alliance (MIPA) and supported by the Baxter Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and the City of Baxter City Council and Planning & Zoning Commission.

The planning process included data collection, a review of existing local plans, and extensive community outreach. Engagement was provided in multiple ways to best suit residents' needs including an online survey, tabling at established community events, and a drop-in open house. Every public comment was read by MIPA staff and incorporated into the development of a community-driven vision and roadmap to guide Baxter's growth and decision-making over the next ten years.

Event	Date	Stakeholders Engaged
Online Survey	March 31 – June 23, 2026	108
Spring Market	May 16, 2026	32
Baseball/Softball Games	May 20, 2026	15
Fire Department Annual Hog Roast	June 7, 2026	27
Baseball/Softball Games	June 8, 2026	1
Drop-In Open House	June 23, 2026	8
Draft Plan 30-Day Comment Period	August 21 – September 21, 2026	TBD
P&Z Public Hearing	September 22, 2026	TBD
City Council Final Adoption	October, 12, 2026	TBD

Photo provided by the Baxter Chamber of Commerce

Vision & Core Values

Baxter is a welcoming, safe, and connected small town where strong schools, engaged residents, and hometown pride create an exceptional quality of life. We honor our small-town feel while embracing smart, sustainable growth through thoughtful infrastructure investments, intentional support for local businesses, construction of quality housing, and the creation of a walkable community. Guided by transparent leadership, coordinated partnerships, and a commitment to empowering every generation, Baxter is a community where families, businesses, and visitors choose to grow, belong, and thrive.

Communication & Transparency

The city and all community organizations prioritize frequent, detailed communication with community residents, workers, and visitors. Staff and board members act with the best interest of Baxter in mind and communicate with honesty and transparency. Communication is offered via multiple mediums to best convey information to all residents.

Action Through Partnership

Partnerships between the city, school district, and community organizations are vital to the success of Baxter. Staff, district leaders, and board chairs are clear about community goals and frequently communicate any and all efforts toward those goals. Actions in one organization work in tandem with others, not independently. The sum of the actions achieves the agreed upon goal.

Empowering All Learners

While this is a core value and mission for the school district, it is also a core value for the community. Learners come in all shapes and sizes, and Baxter is committed to providing educational experiences to all residents regardless of age or ability. Educational experiences take on many different forms from classroom experiences to hands on learning in nature.

Growing Together

Over time, Baxter will likely experience growth in population, school enrollment, and job opportunities. Growth does not mean that the community will lose its small-town feel. With guidance from local leaders and input from residents, growth will be intentional and will add to existing strengths. Every resident may not agree with decisions, but leaders are open to change and new ideas.

Baxter's residents and employees most frequently characterize Baxter as having a small-town feel, being safe, and containing friendly people. When asked what Baxter's best future looks like, residents chose the following descriptions: 1) A vibrant place with events, activities, and things to do year-round 2) A family-friendly place with great schools and safe neighborhoods and 3) A town with more local shops, restaurants, and small businesses.

Baxter's Organizations

Baxter has a number of active community organizations that help meet the needs of residents and visitors. The organizations provide a range of services from every day needs like fire protection and food staples to quality of life needs like recreation opportunities, housing options, and business support. Each group plays an important role in the community and provides a level of service above and beyond what the City of Baxter can provide alone. Implementation of this Comprehensive Plan will rely on continued effort and coordination among and between these organizations to accomplish the outlined goals and objectives.

American Legion

"Advocates for veterans, service members, and military families while fighting to end veteran suicide." [2] The Baxter Legion is pivotal in maintaining the Veterans Memorial Wall and helicopter located on Main Street.

Baxter Rec

Baxter Rec provides athletic opportunities to youth living in the Baxter School District. Volunteers serve on the board, organize sporting events, and maintain the Chad Flora Fields. Parents provide support for concessions at the events.[8]

BEDCO

The Baxter Economic Development Corporation is "committed to enabling economic growth by facilitating the development of housing and new businesses, providing support and solutions to existing businesses, as well as protecting" small-town values.[6]

Chamber

"Exists to support and grow Baxter by fostering a welcoming, friendly, and cohesive small-town community." They "connect businesses, residents, and visitors through collaboration and active involvement, creating a place where everyone feels accepted..."[4]

Fire & Rescue

A group of volunteers committed to helping and serving the needs of Baxter's residents. The Fire & Rescue team responds to medical, fire, and community disaster calls and assists with storm spotting during extreme weather events.[7]

Food Pantry

Helps address food insecurity in the Baxter community. There are no income restrictions, but attendees must live in Baxter or in the Baxter School District region. The breadline is hosted once a month in the Community Center.[3]

Garden Club

Aims to "stimulate knowledge of gardening; aid in the protection of trees, plants, and birds; and promote civic beautification." The club assists with clean-ups around town, hosts home decorating contests, and writes grants for community improvements.[9]

Hometown Pride

"Brings people together to celebrate, improve, and take pride in our small town. Through community, connection, and care, we strive to make Baxter a place where families, friends, and neighbors feel proud to belong."[5]

Past Plans

Comprehensive planning does not take place in a vacuum. Baxter is an active community, and several plans have been completed in recent years to dive into community topics like housing, economic development, and transportation. Those plans are still relevant to Baxter and are incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan with additional data and analysis. The City and community organizations should continue to work toward goals and recommendations in the following plans.

Jasper County Housing Assessment, 2017[10]

The 2017 Housing Assessment reflected that Baxter's population growth was mainly due to families and some older adults. Residents aged 15-34 were seen leaving the community to go to college and start careers. Due to a decrease in population from 2010 to 2015, the Assessment expected the population to continue decreasing, reaching between 1,001 and 1,091 residents by 2030. In 2010, the community was 72% owner occupied units and had a vacancy rate of 4.3%. Between 2000 and 2016, Baxter averaged just two new housing units per year with a maximum of seven units built in 2002 and 2005. Finally, the Assessment projected that 70 new units would be needed between 2021 and 2030 for a total of 8 units per year. Of those units, a 50-50 split of owner-occupied and renter units was assumed to meet the demand for quality rental units.

Boost Report, 2024[11]

The Building Ownership and Organization by Strengthening Teams (BOOST) report focused on downtown development, housing, economic development, and downtown design and building maintenance. With technical assistance from staff at Empower Rural Iowa, the Iowa Economic Development Authority, and the Mid-Iowa Planning Alliance, a steering committee of Baxter residents walked through the community to review needs in each focus area. The following recommendations were proposed:

Downtown Development: retain and support existing businesses, improve signage for businesses, improve signage at the trailhead, fill gaps in needed businesses, understand the market

Economic Development: establish a community foundation, determine the desired business focus (bedroom or prime employer)

Housing: add rental and senior housing options

Downtown Design & Building Maintenance: adopt a downtown design guide, focus on enforcement of maintenance and building use ordinances, consider incentives for building maintenance, add amenities downtown for beautification and vibrancy

Visioning Report, 2025[12]

In 2025, Baxter participated in the Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Process. With a steering committee and feedback from the public, the planning process resulted in a needs assessment, goal setting, a concept plan, and implementation strategies, all with a focus on transportation. The following community goals were established:

Safe pedestrian connectivity to a variety of locations throughout the community including the sports complex, school, trailhead, and parks

Parking solutions near the school.

Improved amenities at the trailhead of the Chichaqua Valley Trail, in parks, and along Main Street.

Improved pedestrian experience on Station Street.

The final report outlined four major projects with improvements ranging from safety to beautification.

Main Street

- Promote beautification
- Upgrade crosswalks and include bumpouts
- Improve ADA accessibility and add handicap parking stalls
- Include trees in bumpouts to continue canopy

School Parking

- Allocate a portion of the park south of the school to parking needs
- Reroute story trail in the park and add 132 parking spots
- Remove parking along Station Street & bus lane

Trailhead Improvements

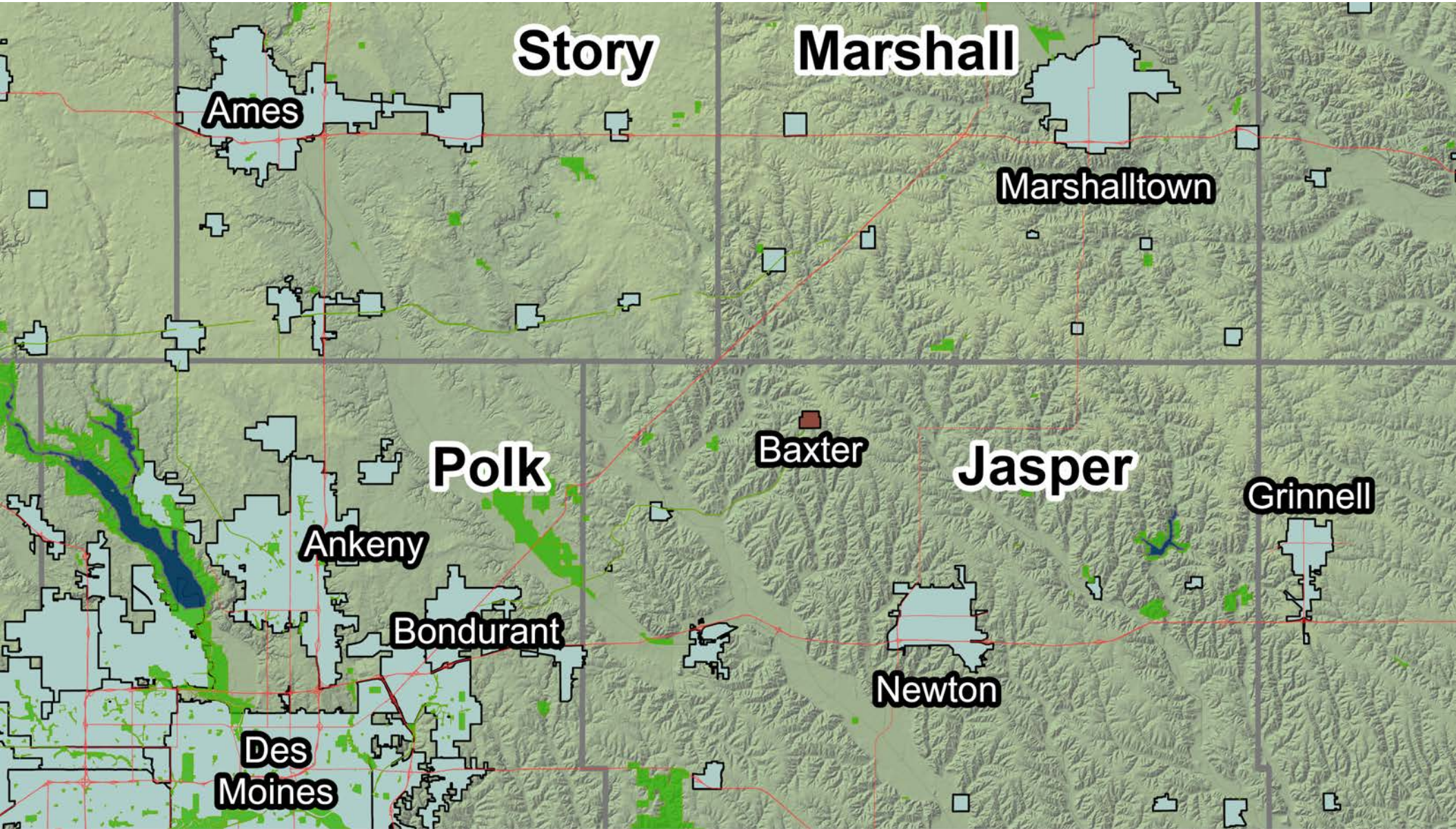
- Include signage, seating, art, a garden, a new informational kiosk, and a shelter with restrooms
- Add bike parking and a repair station
- Repurpose parts of the train for a sculpture

Station Street

- Construct an eight foot trail on the south side
- Add safe pedestrian crossings with ADA panels
- Improve signage and lighting
- Add streetlight banners and shade trees

Community Profile

Baxter is uniquely situated between five larger cities including Ames, Marshalltown, Grinnell, Newton, and the Des Moines metro. A 20 minute drive from Baxter places drivers in Bondurant or Newton, a 30 minute drive in Marshalltown or Grinnell, and a 45 minute drive in Ames or downtown Des Moines. This location allows residents to experience the benefits of living in a small town while having access to a wide variety of amenities in the larger communities. Baxter's location is an asset that should be marketed to potential new residents and businesses.



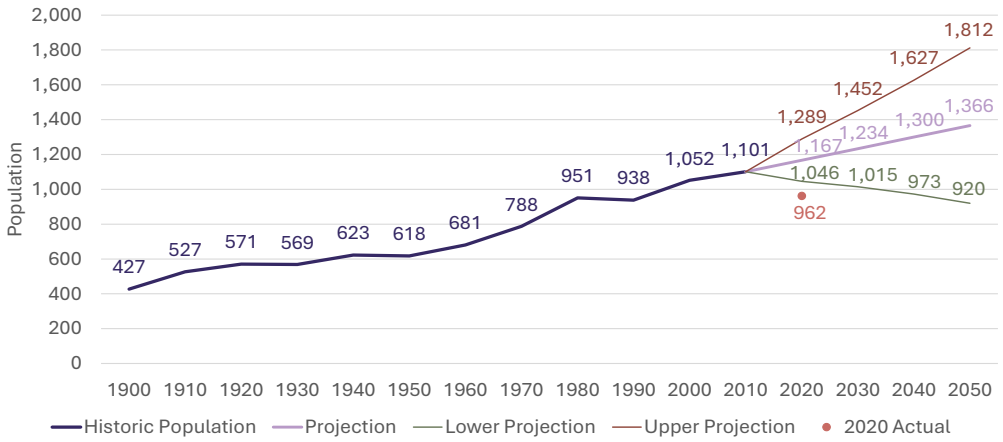
The population in Baxter steadily increased throughout the majority of the 1900s. Despite a slight dip in 1990, the population continued to climb until 2010. However, from 2010 to 2020, there was a 12.6% decrease. The largest decline was in age cohorts 10-14 (-37), 45-49 (-30), and 50-54 (-31). The community rebounded quickly with the 2024 ACS showing 1,247 residents. This rebound suggests that the population decrease was temporary rather than indicative of a long-term trend.

Three population projections were conducted for Baxter. All three use the Triple Exponential Smoothing algorithm with the upper and lower projections accounting for the margin of error in the calculations. The 2020 population was left out of the projections due to the unusually low number and the significant rebound in 2024. The 2024 ACS population puts Baxter between the upper and middle projections. An average of the two will put Baxter at 1,343 residents by 2030; 1,464 by 2040; and 1,589 by 2050.

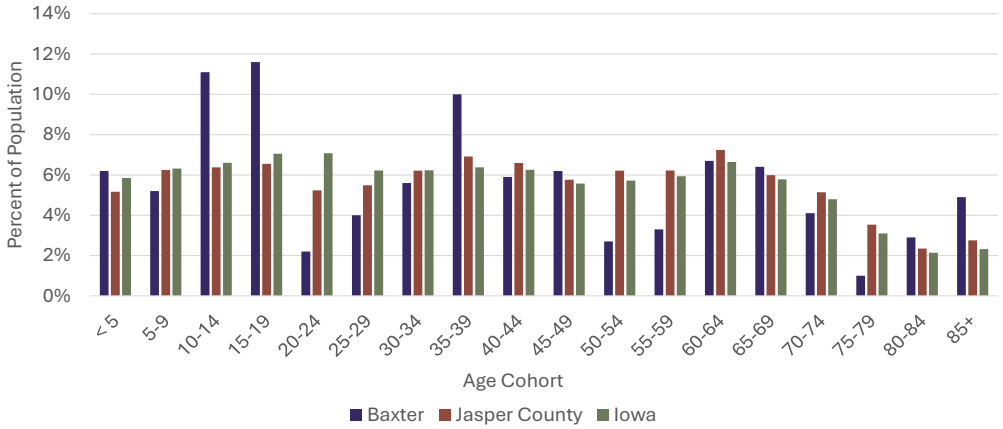
In 2024, the largest age cohort was residents 15-19 years old (11.6%) followed by 10-14 (11.1%) and 35-39 (10%). Those cohorts, along with residents age 85 and older, made up significantly larger percentages of Baxter's population than the same cohorts in Jasper County or the State of Iowa. These cohorts show the prevalence of families with children in Baxter.

Since 1990, the youth population, under 18 years old, has been steadily increasing. The workforce population, age 18-64, increased from 1980 to 2010 but tapered off slightly in 2024. Finally, the senior population decreased from 1980 to 2010 but saw a steep increase from 2010 to 2024. Age cohorts for 2020 were left out due to the unusually low population. Unlike many rural Iowa communities experiencing population loss and an increasingly older population, Baxter maintains a relatively balanced age distribution.

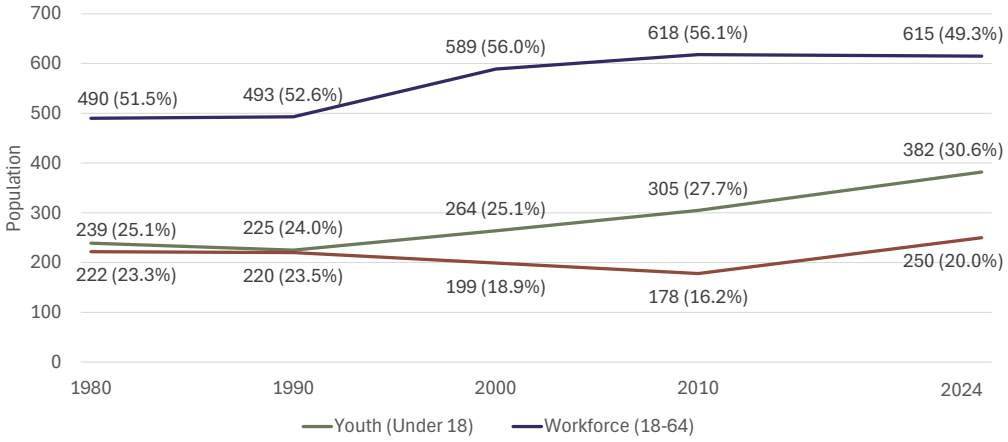
Population Over Time[13]



Population by Age, 2024[14]



Age Cohorts Over Time[15]

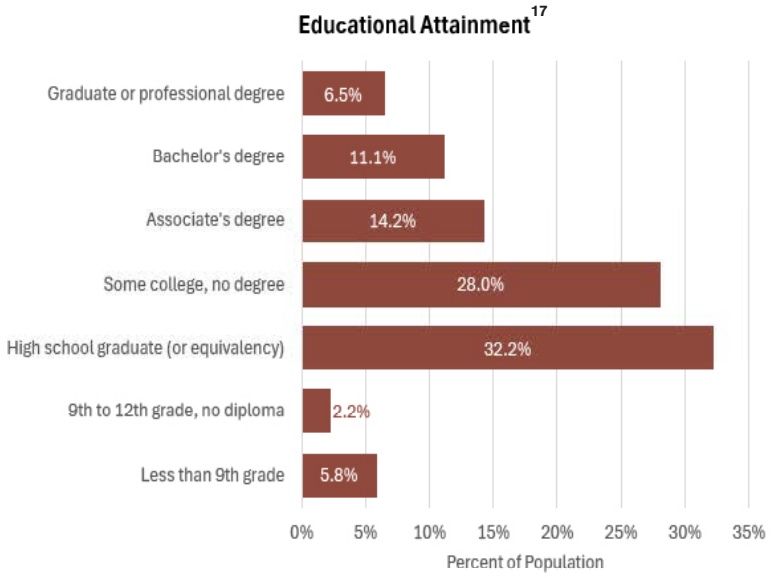


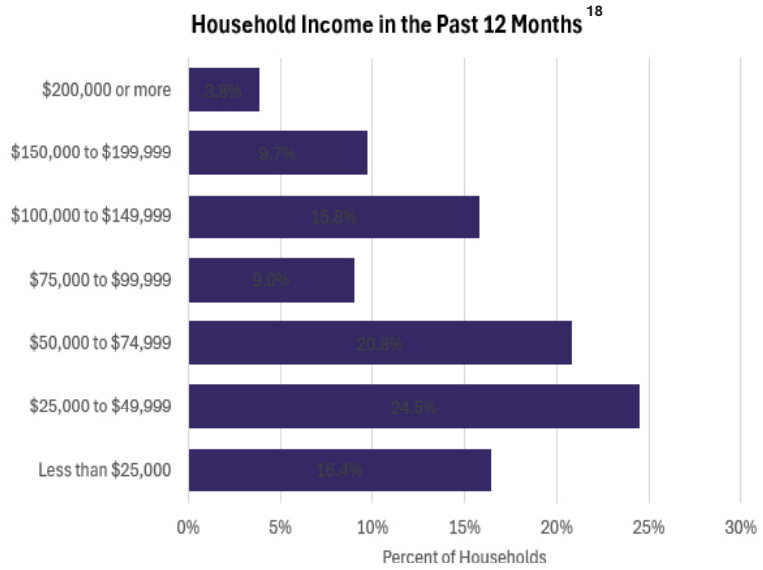
The majority of Baxter residents age 25 and over have a high school diploma or equivalent (32.2%) or have attended some college (28%). Another 31.8% have a college degree. Only 8% of the population does not have a high school diploma (or equivalent).

Baxter's median income is $60,952. Of the households in Baxter, 40.9% make less than $50,000 a year. Another 29.8% of households make between $50,000 and $100,000 a year, and 29.3% make more than $100,000.

Baxter is almost entirely white, with only 0.4% of the population identifying as two or more races. Similarly, only 0.2% of the population identified as Hispanic or Latino. In Jasper County and the State of Iowa, 8.2% and 16% of the population was non-white, respectively.

Race[16]	Baxter	Jasper County	Iowa
White	99.6%	91.8%	84.0%
Black or African American	0%	1.5%	3.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0%	0.1%	0.4%
Asian	0%	0.7%	2.5%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0%	0.2%	0.2%
Some Other Race	0%	1.5%	2.4%
Two or More Races	0.4%	4.2%	6.6%





Housing

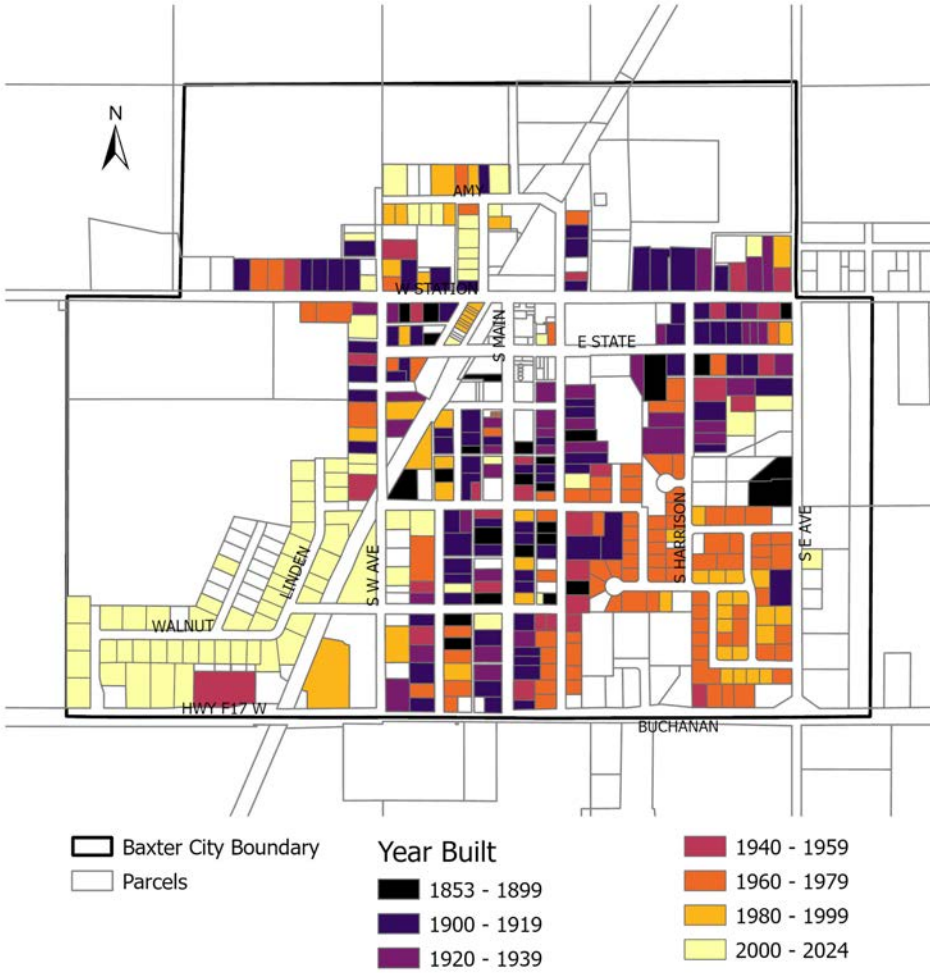
A diverse and high-quality housing stock is essential to Baxter's long-term vitality and growth. Housing plays an important role in attracting new residents, supporting local businesses, and providing opportunities for people at every stage of life to call Baxter home. As the community grows and changes, planning for a variety of housing types, affordability, and neighborhood quality will help ensure Baxter remains a welcoming place for current and future residents.

In 2024, Baxter had 507 housing units, 93.9% of which were occupied units. The community's vacancy rate of 6.1% is considered slightly elevated compared to the healthy average of 5%. Owner occupied units make up three quarters of the housing stock with nearly all units single family detached. Of the rental units, the largest portion are in buildings with three or four units. Nearly a quarter are single family detached units.

Total Housing Units[19]	**507**	
Vacant	31	6.1%
Occupied	476	93.9%
Owner-Occupied	**354**	**74.4%**
1, Detached	344	97.2%
1, Attached	5	1.4%
Mobile Home	5	1.4%
Renter Occupied	**122**	**25.6%**
1, Detached	34	27.9%
1, Attached	3	2.5%
2 Apartments	26	21.3%
3-9 Apartments	59	48.4%

The Jasper County Assessor had data on the year that homes were built for 399 units which covered 78.7% of the housing units in Baxter. This did not include many of the multi-family units including but not limited to the Harrison Park Apartments, Baxter Park Apartments, and Baxter Senior Citizens. Approximately 19.3% of the assessed housing units were built in the 1960s and 70s. Another 15.8% were built in the 1900s and 1910s closely followed by 15.2% in 2000 or later. In 1978, lead-based paint was banned from the United States. Homes built prior to 1978 present needs for rehabilitation. In Baxter, approximately 53.5% of the homes assessed were built prior to 1978.

Year Built[20]	Total	Share
1853-1899	26	5.1%
1900-1919	80	15.8%
1920-1939	37	7.3%
1940-1959	30	5.9%
1960-1979	98	19.3%
1980-1999	51	10.1%
2000-2024	77	15.2%
TOTAL	399	78.7%



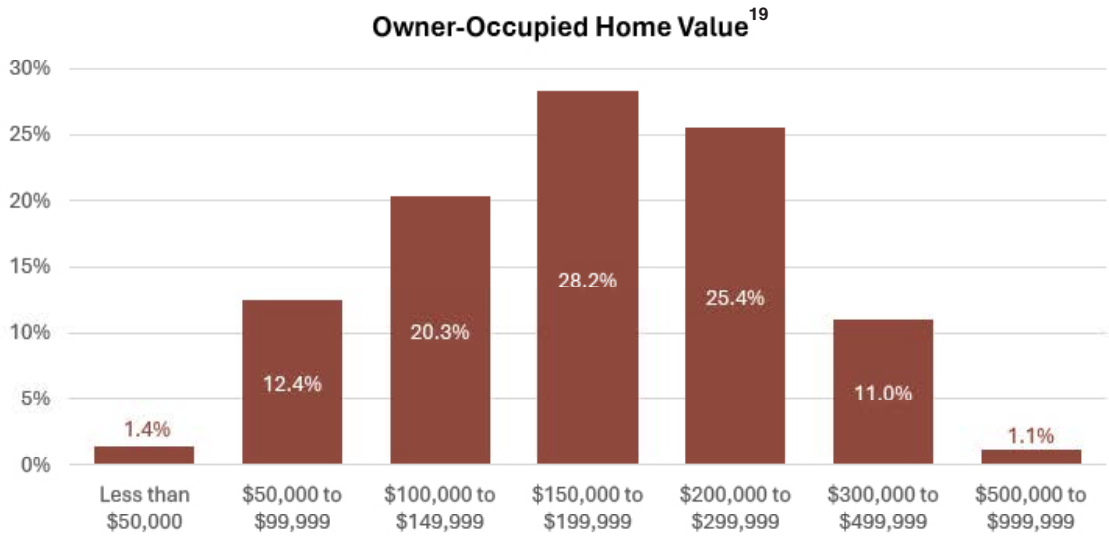
Jasper County Assessor also provided data on the condition of homes for the same 78.7% of housing units. The majority of homes assessed were rated Normal. Only 11.6% were rated Below Normal or worse. The units rated Poor or Very Poor are scattered throughout the community and are not concentrated in specific areas.

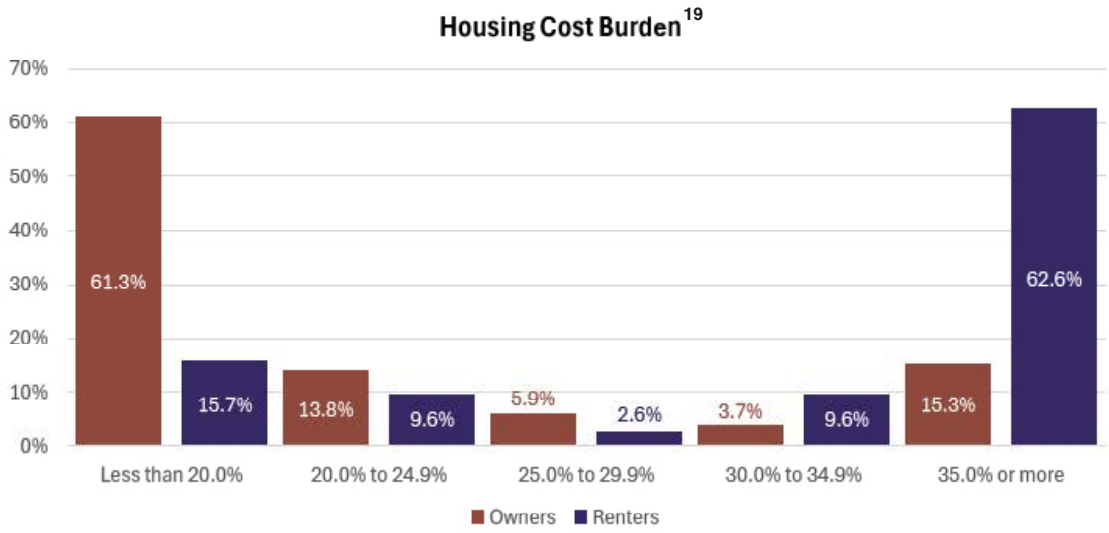
A Normal rating means that a home is in normal condition for its age. For example, a new home is given a Normal rating and an older home that has had standard maintenance over the years is also given a Normal rating. Homes rated Below Normal or Fair are often older homes that have some maintenance needs that have not been addressed. Poor or Very Poor homes often have more maintenance needs or larger repair needs beyond standard maintenance. Homeowners may need financial assistance or project support to get Poor or Very Poor homes back to a Normal rating.

Condition[20]	Total	Share
Excellent/ Very Good	1	0.2%
Good/Above Normal	19	3.7%
Normal	315	62.1%
Below Normal/Fair	37	7.3%
Poor/Very Poor	22	4.3%
Observed	5	1.0%
Total	399	78.7%
TOTAL	399	78.7%

Of the owner-occupied units in Baxter, 53.6% are valued between $150,000 and $299,999. Another 27% fall between $100,000 and $149,999.

For housing to be considered affordable, households should be spending 30% or less of their income on that housing. Households paying more than 30% are considered housing cost burdened. The majority of owners in Baxter spend less than 20% of their income on housing. This includes owners who have completely paid off their homes. Approximately 19% of owners (67 households) are housing cost burdened. Renters experience a nearly opposite trend. Only 15.7% of renters spend less than 20% of their income on housing while 72.2% are cost burdened. This signifies that 83 renter households need more affordable housing options, higher wages, cheaper childcare, or any combination of these and other factors.





Meeting future housing demand is an important component of long-range community planning. Evaluating anticipated housing needs allows the City and community organizatons to identify opportunities for new residential development, support community growth, and ensure housing options remain available for residents with varying needs and incomes. While future market conditions may change, estimating housing demand provides a useful framework for planning and investment decisions. The following housing demand forecast estimates future housing demand for 2040.

Using the average population projection for 2040 and the average household size from 2024, the model estimates the projected number of households. The number of vacant units and replacement units are added to the projected households. The model uses an average healthy vacancy rate of five percent. Additionally, a replacement rate of 0.5% is standard to account for old units that cannot be rehabilitated or unexpected events such as fires. Finally, the number of units available in 2024 and the number of units built in 2025 are subtracted from the required number of units to determine the amount of housing that should be built before 2040. In Baxter, 97 housing units are needed before 2040. Assuming a similar tenure breakdown as 2020, 72 units should be owner-occupied, and 25 units renter-occupied.

It is important to note that this model assumes no change in birth rate, mortality rate, or migration trends. Changes in economic or social factors can cause changes to this model, and it should be reviewed at that time. The model also does not account for municipal limitations such as roadway or utility infrastructure or fire and EMS capacity. Local leaders should work closely with developers to construct units in a way that aligns with city goals and planning.

Housing Demand Forecast[19]	
2040 Projected Population	1,464
(÷) Average People per Household	2.56
(=) 2040 Projected Households	572
(+) Vacancy Rate (5%)	29
(+) Replacement Housing (0.5%)	3
(=) Required Number of Housing Units	604
(-) 2024 Available Units	507
(-) Units Built 2025	0
(=) Total Units to be Built Before 2040	**97**

Assets

Compact Development

Over time, residential development in Baxter has occurred in a way that has not left a significant number of open lots throughout the community. This is actually a major benefit to the community as it provides more housing with less roads and utilities. The infill lots that do exist in Baxter already have plans for future housing. Now, the City and community organizations can focus their efforts on development around the exterior of the town.

BEDCO Owned Land

BEDCO owns 39 acres of land just north of Westfield Horizons and just south of the Sports Complex. Having this land owned by an economic development organization is both an asset and an opportunity – particularly in a community where developable land is difficult to come by. Its location near existing residential and institutional amenities makes the land best suited for additional residential development. Westfield Horizons should be expanded and the road looped to provide a variety of housing choices and improved walkability in the community. When asked what types of new housing should be considered, Baxter residents favored small single-family homes (72% of survey respondents), senior living (55%), and large single-family homes (50%). Large portions also supported condominium/townhomes (38%) and duplexes (26%). A mix of housing types would best support the diverse needs of residents including new families and seniors.

Needs

Additional Units for a Growing Community

The need for new housing was mentioned throughout public engagement with experiences of new teachers not having housing options and homes selling before potential buyers even knew about the opportunity. The housing demand forecast supports these experiences. Approximately 97 housing units are needed to support Baxter's residents if Baxter continues to grow as it has in past decades. With a thriving school district and several recent grants to support quality of life improvements, Baxter could see growth beyond 97 units. Overall, city staff, City Council, and the community organizations should work together to support housing growth in the community. New units provide opportunities for additional families and workers which will support school district growth and business development.

City services should be reviewed in tandem with housing growth considerations. As the community grows, so will the need for street maintenance, fire and EMS services, city staff hours, and more. Essential services go hand-in-hand with housing development.

Senior Housing Options

To hone in on housing needs, senior housing options are especially desired by residents. Baxter's senior population, over age 65, is increasing and with that comes different housing needs. Senior residents have a desire to age in place, remaining in Baxter with options for smaller, one-level homes that provide accessibility features like step-free entries and wide doorways. Senior housing options can take on many forms including apartments with shared community spaces, agrihoods with additional access to nature, assisted living, or specialized care like memory care units. Small, one-level, single family homes are good options as they provide opportunities not only for seniors but also for families with young children. Other types of senior housing should be explored as well.

Rental Options for All Incomes

Approximately 25 of the 97 units needed by 2040 should be rental options to maintain Baxter's current tenure split. Rentals can be a great choice for a variety of households including families that are new to town, seniors looking to downsize, and more. Traditionally, households move from renter to first-time buyer to repeat buyer, upgrading a home for size, location, or comfort. However, life changes such as children moving out, divorce, retirement, or just personal preference could lead households back to renting or to other housing options. Providing both owner-occupied and rental homes offers community members variety for wherever they are in life.

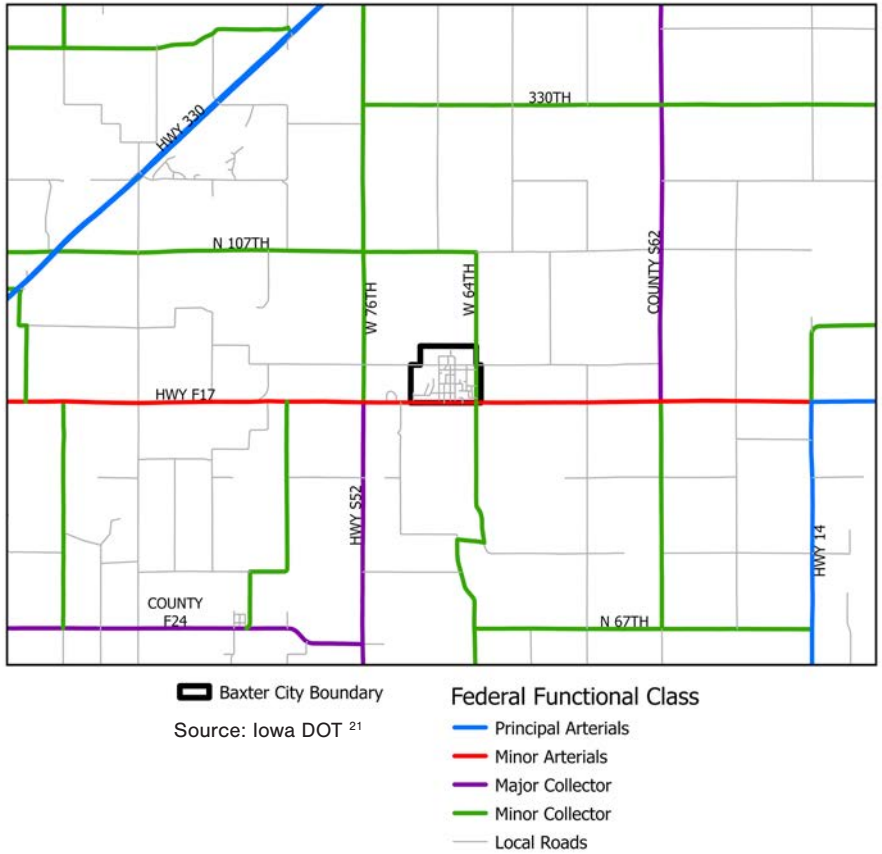
"We really need rentals that appeal to young families with modern updates and are within a price range that is affordable."
~Resident via Online Survey

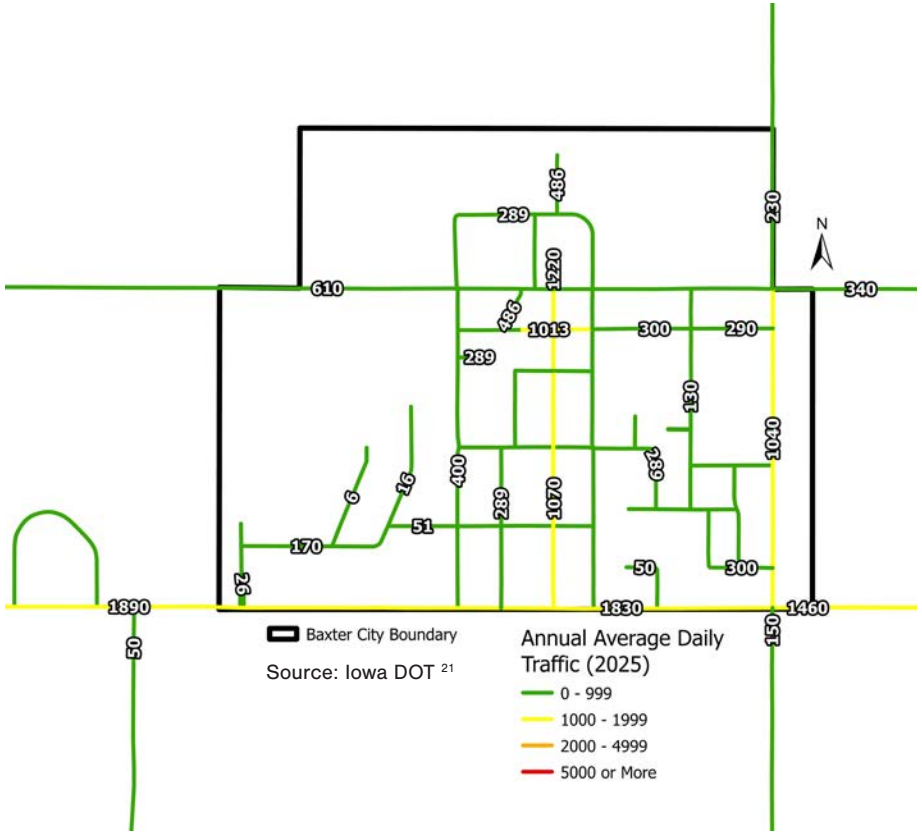
Transportation & Utilities

A safe, reliable, and connected transportation system supports the daily lives of residents, businesses, and visitors alike. Transportation extends beyond streets and utilities to include sidewalks, trails, and the infrastructure needed to safely move people throughout the community. As future investments are made, the City will prioritize maintaining existing infrastructure, improving connectivity, and enhancing accessibility for all users.

The Federal Highway Administration organizes roadways in its Functional Classification system with arterial roads providing the most traffic flow and the least access, local roads providing the most access with the least traffic flow, and collectors in between.

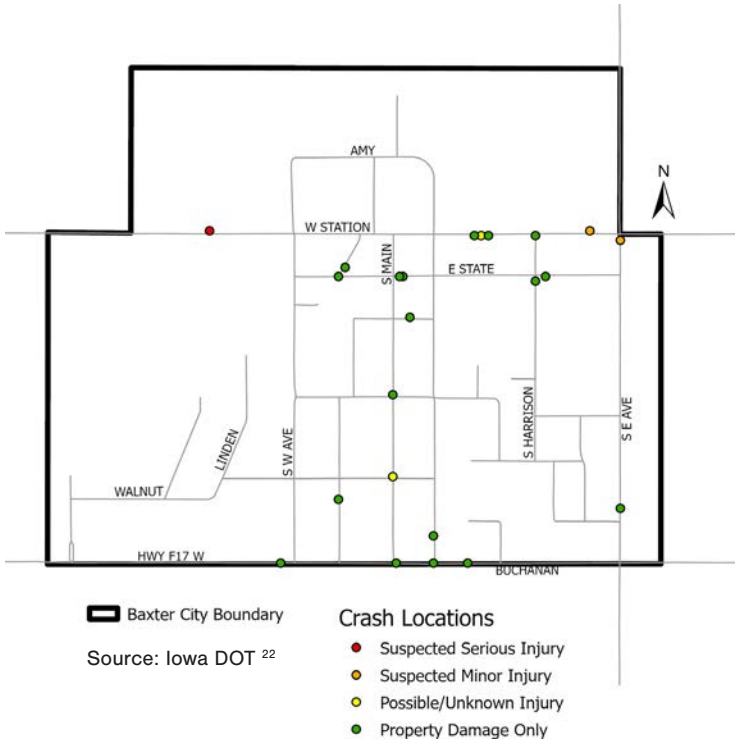
As is typical, arterials and collectors in Baxter have higher annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes than most local roads. Buchanan Street (minor arterial) sees the most traffic followed by Main Street (local) and East Avenue (minor collector). As a local road, Main Street sees more traffic than East Avenue due to the local businesses downtown and its proximity to the school on State Street.



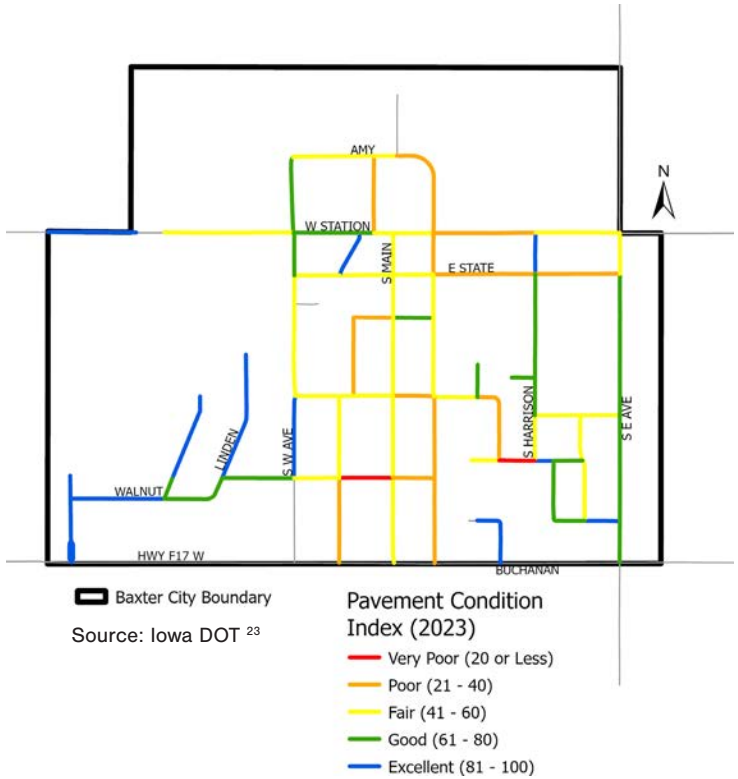


In the most recent 10-year period from 2015 to 2025 (up to December 18, 2025), the Iowa DOT recorded 23 crashes in Baxter that resulted in one serious injury and two minor injuries. Driver distraction, either interior or exterior, was the most common cause of crashes and contributed to 26% of the incidents. Nearly one-third of the crashes occurred on Station Street including all of the crashes that resulted in serious or minor injuries. State Street and Buchanan Street also had several crashes representing 26% and 17% of the incidents, respectively.

Roadway pavement conditions are collected every 4 years by the Iowa DOT through the Iowa Pavement Management Program (IPMP) at the Institute for Transportation (InTrans) at Iowa State University. The most recent data collection for Baxter was in 2023. The Pavement Condition Index (PCI) is a numerical measure of pavement condition from 0, representing failed pavement, to 100, representing new pavement. Of the approximately 11.4 miles of roads in Baxter, the median PCI was 56, and the average PCI was about 59, indicating the pavement conditions in the city are generally Fair. There are few segments in Very Poor condition (20 or less). In 2026, the City completed a project to convert S West Avenue from a gravel road to a paved road.



Source: Iowa DOT [22]



Source: Iowa DOT [23]

From a utilities standpoint, water and wastewater service is provided by the City. Drinking water comes from the Iowa Regional Utilities Association while wastewater is treated at the City's facility just south of town.[24] In 2009, the City's wastewater treatment plant was found to be out of compliance with the Department of Natural Resources' standards. As a result, the City installed new lagoons at the plant.

Electric service is provided by Alliant Energy and Consumers Energy. Alliant covers the majority of the community, but Consumers covers a small portion on the southwest side of the city. Natural gas is provided by Black Hills Energy. Partner Communications Cooperative provides internet access to the entire community with the Federal Communications Commission confirming 100% broadband coverage in Baxter.[25]

Assets

Chichaqua Valley Trail

The Chichaqua Valley Trail (CVT) provides Baxter residents with access to recreation through walking, running, cycling, and more. The trail spans 26 miles with Baxter serving as one trailhead and Norwoodville, just north of Des Moines, serving as the other trailhead. Both Polk and Jasper County Conservation manage the trail while the Friends of Chichaqua Valley Trail promote tourism and economic development along the trail. The CVT presents an opportunity for Baxter to further engage with recreation, tourism, and art along and near the trail.

In 2018, Baxter saw approximately 4,875 riders on the Chichaqua Valley Trail. This jumped to 9,443 riders in 2022 and 7,513 riders in 2023. During one of the busiest days in Baxter in 2026, the Saturday of Baxter Fun Days, the community hosted nearly 200 bike riders. This is an undeniable opportunity for tourism and growth. Community leaders should continue communicating with Jasper County Conservation to ensure that trail maintenance needs are met. The CVT contains many holes and ruts that make biking difficult and need solutions beyond patching and filling.

"The bike trail is in the perfect location and it's always full of riders and walkers!" ~Resident via Online Survey

"Improve trailhead with fully functioning shelter house." ~Resident via Online Survey

Needs

Capital Improvements Plan

A major complaint amongst Baxter residents is the high cost of utilities in the city. The wastewater treatment plant project was a significant investment for the City and contributed to sewer rates in Baxter that are considerably higher than neighboring jurisdictions. While capital improvement projects and increasing rates are unavoidable, the City can anticipate and plan for needed projects with a capital improvements plan (CIP). The City will complete a CIP after this Comprehensive Plan and should continue to revise and update the CIP in future years. This should be paired with resident education to inform the public of future projects and expenses.

"Can be expensive to live here with sewer rates, property taxes and having Alliant Energy..." ~Resident via Online Survey

Implementation of Community Visioning

Sidewalks to community amenities, ADA improvements, parking at the school district, trailhead improvements, and general beautification efforts were all covered in Baxter's 2025 Community Visioning Report. Residents and visitors at public engagement events for this Comprehensive Plan reiterated that all of those elements are still major community priorities. The City and community organizations should continue to pursue implementation of the Community Visioning Report to meet both transportation and recreation needs.

Sidewalk & Street Maintenance

Sidewalk and street maintenance and the expansion of the sidewalk system were major concerns for residents. These resources are used day in and day out as residents commute to work and community amenities. While city infrastructure cannot be fixed all at once, a CIP will help the city navigate deferred maintenance projects alongside new projects. Incremental progress will show that taxpayer money is being prioritized in a strategic fashion. Furthermore, the city already has an ordinance that requires sidewalks to be installed for new developments. This will allow the city to focus on sidewalk repair and closing any gaps rather than solely keeping up with new construction.

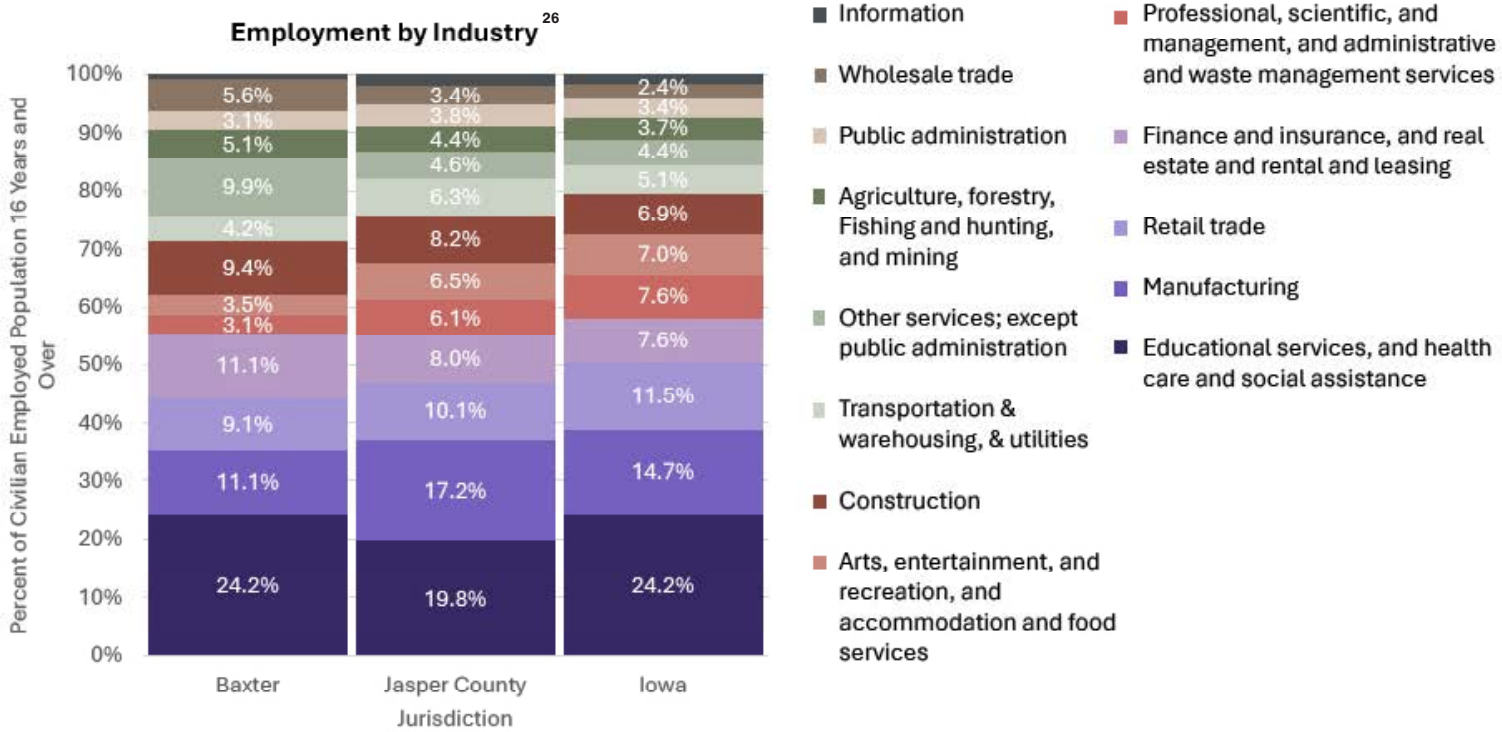
"Our streets are obviously not great in town and unfortunately I think that the streets need completely redone in most spots rather than patching them. If we had to focus on one thing, I would say the streets are a big focus."
~Resident via Online Survey

"I saw a man with a walker who had to pick it up and walk with in the other day because he couldn't use it on a sidewalk on Main Street." ~Resident via Paper Survey

Economic Development

A strong local economy contributes to Baxter's quality of life by supporting local businesses, creating employment opportunities, and providing the goods and services residents need close to home. While preserving its small-town character, Baxter has opportunities to strengthen its business community through strategic investment, partnerships, and thoughtful development. Supporting existing businesses, encouraging entrepreneurship, and attracting new commercial opportunities that complement the community's needs will help foster long-term economic resilience.

Baxter has 915 residents who are 16 years of age and older. Approximately 64.3% of those individuals are in the civilian labor force. The community has an unemployment rate of 2.4%. Of the employed population, the largest portion work in educational services, healthcare, and social assistance. The same is true at both the county and state level. Baxter has a slightly smaller percentage of employees working in manufacturing, arts and entertainment, and professional services compared to Jasper County and the state but a larger percentage of employees working in wholesale and retail trade, construction, and other services. Other services include equipment repair, religious activities, personal care services, pet care services, laundry services, and more.



The State of Iowa conducts projections for these industries by region with Jasper County included in the Central Iowa region alongside Boone, Dallas, Madison, Marion, Polk, Story, and Warren counties. Educational service; ambulatory health care; social assistance; hospitals; and professional, scientific, and technical services all ranked high in both numeric and percent change in employment. These high growth industries are also quite stable with educational and health services always in demand. While these industries are still impacted by economic fluctuations, they tend to be more resilient due to consistent and ongoing demand. Investing in resilient industries can support Baxter's desire to grow while providing a strong employment base. The community can also invest in other high growth industries to expand job opportunities for local residents.

Industry (Central Iowa)[27]	2024 Base Employment	2034 Projected Employment	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Ambulatory Health Care Services	20,643	23,752	3,109	15.1%
Educational Services	47,225	54,008	6,783	14.4%
Chemical Manufacturing	1,536	1,748	212	13.8%
Social Assistance	13,581	15,305	1,724	12.7%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	26,457	29,509	3,052	11.5%
Couriers and Messengers	3,573	3,964	391	10.9%
Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation	1,413	1,561	148	10.5%
Warehousing and Storage	6,768	7,467	699	10.3%
Hospitals	17,106	18,710	1,604	9.4%
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	2,085	2,279	194	9.3%

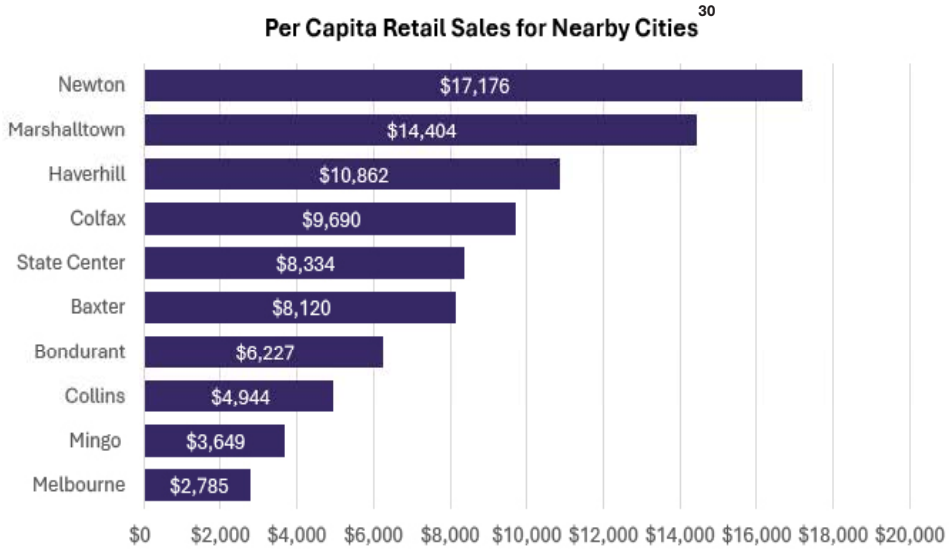
Approximately 446 individuals live in Baxter but work outside of the community. These residents commute to Des Moines, Newton, Ankeny, West Des Moines, Altoona, and Ames among other locations. Another 240 individuals work in Baxter but live in Newton, Ankeny, Mingo, Des Moines, and West Des Moines among other locations. Providing additional goods, services, and quality of life amenities can help encourage these workers to move into the community. Finally, 31 individuals both live and work in Baxter.[28]

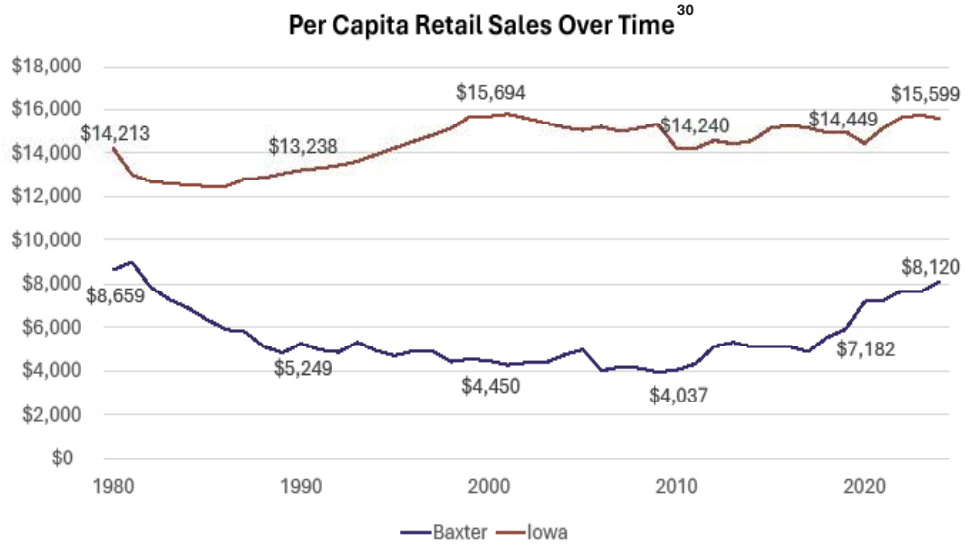
The average Baxter resident spends 26.9 minutes commuting to work with 26.1% of residents spending less than 15 minutes commuting and 54.3% spending 30 to 59 minutes commuting.[29] Approximately 6.9% or 33 Baxter residents work from home compared to 10.6% in Jasper County and 11.3% in the State of Iowa.[26] The city can continue to support work from home lifestyles by providing third spaces with public Wi-Fi, quiet workspaces in the library, outdoor recreation, and other quality of life improvements.

From a per capita retail sales perspective, Baxter ranks sixth among ten nearby communities. Newton and Marshalltown have the highest retail sales per capita which is to be expected due to the size of the communities and the retail options offered. State Center and Colfax's locations along Highway 30 and Highway 80 likely support higher retail sales compared to Baxter, but Baxter has an opportunity to capitalize on pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicular traffic from the Chichaqua Valley Trail to boost retail sales.

The community saw high per capita sales in 1980 and 1981 with sales falling to a low of $3,999 in 2006. Since then, sales have rebounded, nearly reaching the values in 1980 with $8,120 in per capita sales in 2024. This was 52% of the state per capita sales.

The data indicate that, while Baxter is not expected to function as a regional retail center, there is opportunity to increase local spending and attract visitor expenditures through downtown enhancements, business recruitment, trail-oriented amenities, and continued investment in the community's commercial areas.





Assets

Existing Small Businesses

Baxter has several small businesses that provide essential goods and services to residents and improve the quality of life in the community. Many of the businesses were listed by name during public engagement efforts. Furthermore, behind every business are owners who often give themselves wholeheartedly to improving not only their business, but the community as a whole. Many business owners serve on City Council and on boards and commissions throughout the community. They, like others, give of both their time and their money to see Baxter thrive.

"We also have incredible local businesses that are so committed to our town." ~Resident via Online Survey

BEDCO & The Chamber

Between BEDCO supporting the development of housing and new businesses and the Chamber providing connection for businesses, residents, and visitors, Baxter has the organizations and people to create lasting change in the community. By leveraging resources like land and grant funding alongside human innovation and ingenuity, Baxter can improve the business environment for both existing and future businesses. The organizations can try out new ideas such as a business incubator or Chamber speaker nights to see what approaches work best for Baxter. Both organizations should work closely with the city, school, and other organizations to ensure that actions align toward a higher goal.

Needs

Business Support & Development

Another top priority for Baxter residents and workers is attracting new businesses to town. Residents would like to see additional restaurants and shopping in the downtown and larger commercial development to create more jobs. Additional commercial development will grow the tax base for both the city and the school district. In June 2026, Dollar General opened its doors in Baxter. This was one topic that Baxter residents did not have a cohesive vision for. Some residents supported Dollar General as a low cost option for groceries in a community without a grocery store and others were not in favor of the small box retailer. The need for a grocery store was apparent after Baxter Family Market closed in September 2025. The addition of Dollar General will likely prevent a local grocery store from developing in the near future as some residents fear. Now that Dollar General is open, community leaders can better understand whether residents are still split on the retailer or whether opinions have changed. This can help guide future development decisions in the community.

Vacant Property Ordinance

Downtown Baxter has several vacancies or underutilized properties, especially with the loss of the Baxter Police Department and the Baxter Family Market. Understanding which properties are vacant is the first step toward redevelopment for a higher use. A vacant property ordinance requires property owners to register vacant properties, pay a fee to support public safety in and around the property, and create a plan for re-use or redevelopment. This ordinance can help encourage property owners to use or sell a building. Due to a limited number of city staff, Baxter should focus this ordinance on commercial properties. The ordinance can be expanded to include residential properties if the need arises and staff capacity allows for the addition.

"The downtown area is not appealing with the grocery store, laundromat, the lot at the end of Main Street."
~Resident via Online Survey

Downtown Improvements

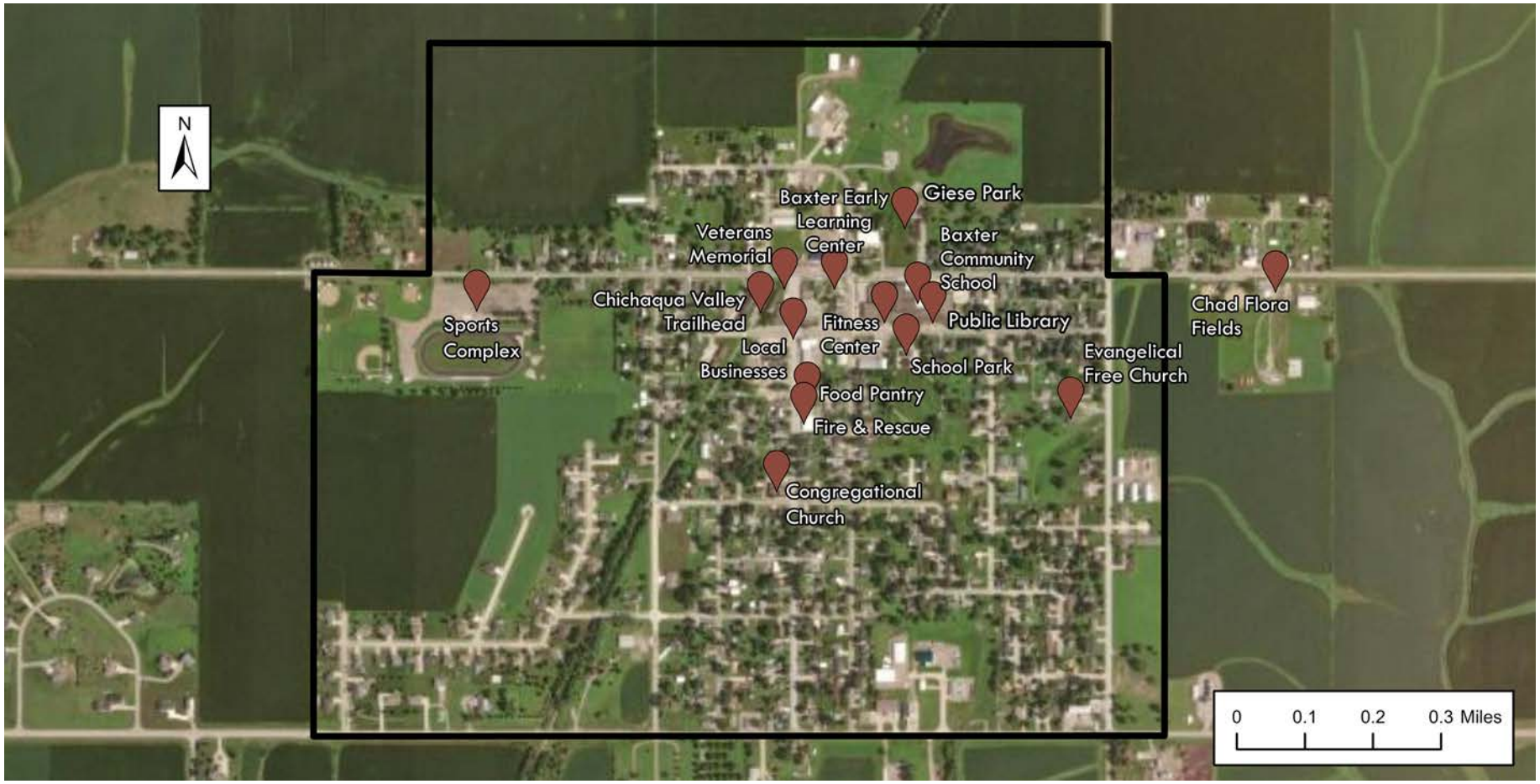
Efforts have been made across Baxter to beautify the community including tree plantings in Giese Park and flower planters installed along Main Street. Additional efforts should be focused downtown to improve the visual appeal for residents and visitors. Small windows and lack of signage can create confusion for new residents and visitors regarding whether businesses are open and where to enter the businesses. Larger windows would benefit the downtown area visually but can be costly for business owners to install and create higher cooling bills in the summer months. Business owners can try out other beautification efforts such as window boxes, decorative lighting, painted doors, and small outdoor seating. Banners on street lights and a mural at the northwest corner of Main Street and State Street would also add vibrancy downtown. The vacant property ordinance and businesses attraction will only further enhance the appearance of downtown.

"Because the downtown businesses' windows are all dark and it's hard to see inside of them, they're not very welcoming. Some of the shops we finally walked into we had avoided for the first two years because they looked boxed in and closed."
~Resident via Online Survey

Volunteers & Community Facilities

Baxter is filled with community assets including the people who make Baxter a great place to live and the facilities that add quality of life benefits. The community's physical assets are mapped for reference. Many of the locations were specifically mentioned during the public engagement process. Also of note, several assets are available due to community partnerships. The Early Learning Center provides childcare for Baxter families and was the result of financial contributions from the USDA, BEDCO, the Baxter School District, and the City of Baxter. The city and school district also share the library and fitness center. The facilities are in the school building with access provided to community members.

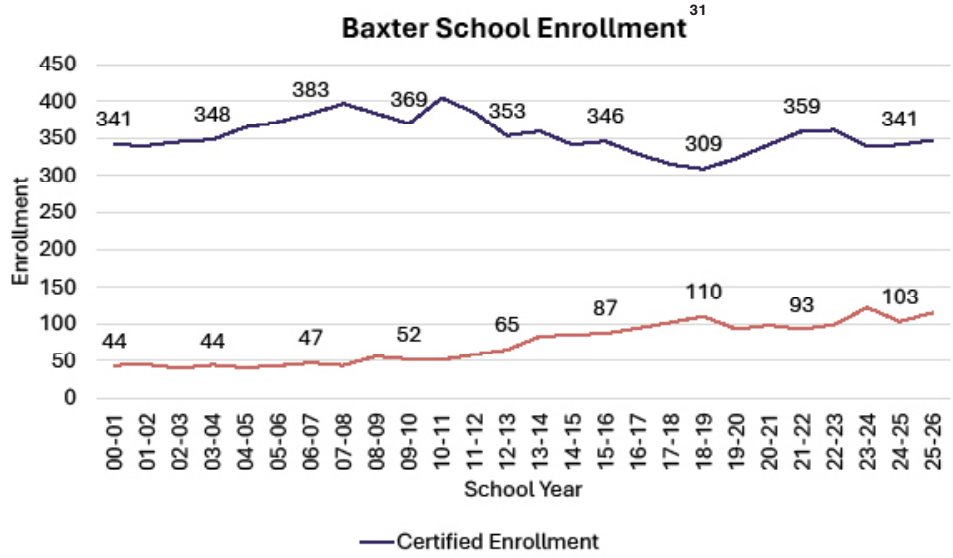
Some services are not provided directly in Baxter but are available nearby. The Baxter Police Department dissolved in late 2025, and services are now provided by Jasper County Sheriff. Additionally, there are no healthcare services or providers in Baxter. Baxter Fire and Rescue provides emergency medical services but residents commute to Newton, Marshalltown, or the Des Moines metro for general or specialized care.



Assets

Baxter Community School District

The Baxter School District is by far one of the biggest strengths in the community. When asked what three items they value most about Baxter, 59% of survey respondents selected the school district (the second highest response). Since 2000, the district's enrollment number have remained relatively steady. During the same time period, the district has seen an increase in net open enrollment, or the number of students open enrolling into the district minus the number of students open enrolling out of the district. District leaders indicate that net open enrollment is often about convenience for parents but comes with some volatility as those students are more likely to leave the district from one year to the next. In fall 2025, the Baxter School District switched to four-day school weeks which led to increased open enrollment and more applicants for open teacher positions.



During public engagement, students and parents stated that the teachers, class options, sports, physical condition of the school, and small class sizes were all strengths of the school district. They also appreciated the district being innovative with the four-day school weeks. Some residents expressed a desire for the district to continue partnerships with other organizations such as the city for the library and fitness center. For improvements, parents stated a need to spread funds evenly between girls and boys sports, arts, culture, and music programs. Overall, students and parents receive information from the district primarily through emails and morning announcements.

District leaders expressed that starter homes and business growth would have the biggest positive impact on the school.

Volunteers

The residents are the lifeblood of Baxter. When asked about the community's strengths, 36% of survey respondents mentioned the people and the community – especially that people are friendly and the community is close knit. Some residents choose to volunteer their time on boards and in community organizations. As previously mentioned, those organizations develop plans, write grants, and move projects forward to improve life in Baxter. This does not go unnoticed. Many residents mentioned these groups throughout public engagement.

However, volunteers are also needed in Baxter. Community organizations are often run by a mighty few where the same volunteers wear multiple hats and burnout and fatigue are real threats to success. There is a need to encourage volunteerism, promote open positions, and grow future leaders within the community. Eventually, existing leaders will look to step aside for new leaders to carry on successes and champion new projects.

> *"I admire all the groups in Baxter that are based solely on volunteers. These groups continually are doing everything in their power to make things happen and better our community. It is so amazing seeing all of the work that these groups such as Baxter Rec, Baxter Chamber, Hometown Pride, Garden Club, Legion, etc. do throughout our town and how much they work together on everything. Our volunteers are our greatest strengths by far!" ~ Resident via Online Survey*

> *"Involvement in committees and groups can be limited and feel like the same people wearing multiple hats." ~Resident via Online Survey*

Giese Park

For a small community, Baxter has several recreational opportunities including the Chichaqua Trail, parks maintained by the city and the school, and youth sports for kids of all ages. Giese Park stands out as a highlight and an opportunity for Baxter residents. In recent years, Giese Park has seen improvements with new playground equipment installed and pond dredging completed to better manage stormwater and allow fishing for the first time. Initial plans for the park featured a splash pad, and residents still have a desire to see that project completed. In addition, a trail around the pond, a dog park, and an amphitheater were all highlighted during public engagement as possible future amenities.

Needs

Welcoming New Residents & Ideas

While Baxter's residents resoundingly stated that community members are friendly and supportive, this does not eliminate the need for additional community welcoming. Being small and tight-knit is certainly a strength for the community, but it can also present a challenge for new community members to break into. Existing residents should practice being open-minded, encouraging and supporting diversity and new ideas, not just ideas from long-standing families. An annual welcome event or a Chamber social could introduce new residents to services and organizations in Baxter or connect potential new business owners to existing business leaders.

> *"The biggest thing is acceptance within the community and feeling a sense of belonging. I think that there could be implementation within the community on celebrating other cultures and supporting different backgrounds... I think that change within the community focusing on diversity and celebrating that will help others feel included, acknowledged and respected."*
> *~Resident via Online Survey*

Public Art & Creative Spaces

With so many active organizations, it can seem like Baxter has an organization to cover every topic. However, public art is lacking in the community and missing a champion organization. Murals, art installations, sculptures, and more would assist with beautification downtown, along the Chichaqua Trail, and all across Baxter. Art and creative placemaking can help tell the story of Baxter, improve the local economy, and create grassroots change in the community. Furthermore, art can bring more visitors and encourage visitors to stay for longer. As previously mentioned, an amphitheater in Giese Park could host school performances, music in the park events, and more.

Recreation Center

Several stakeholders in Baxter expressed a desire to have a multi-use recreation center including Baxter Rec, school district leaders, and members of the public. Such a facility would need to be a partnership between the city, school, Baxter Rec, and potentially other organizations. The facility could provide space for a new fitness center, recreation fields for a variety of sports, an indoor track for walking or running, meeting spaces for organizations, and more. While this project is a long-range vision, coordination and fundraising efforts can make the project feasible even in a short time frame. Furthermore, a facility to host sporting events and tournaments can draw in more visitors and create additional revenues for the city, school, and local businesses.

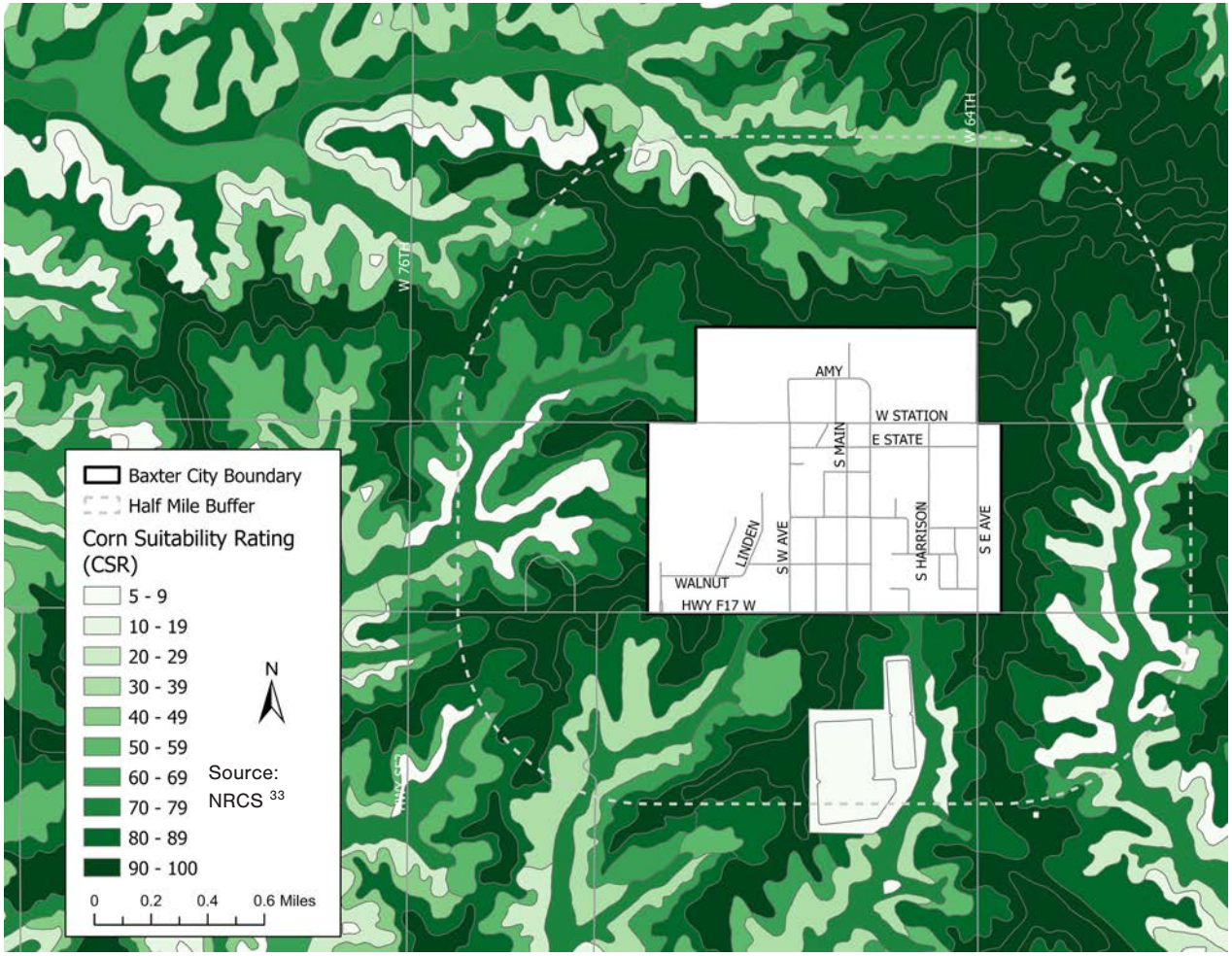
> *"Baxter could benefit from a multi-use recreational complex that would allow for indoor entertainment (similar to the Field House in Nevada, but perhaps on a smaller scale). This would upgrade school, community and Baxter recreation opportunities for citizens and children. It could also provide a place for groups to rent and use."*
> *~Resident via Online Survey*

Baxter Chamber of Commerce

Agriculture, Natural Resources, & Hazards

The land surrounding Baxter is mainly defined by cropland. Baxter, like much of Iowa, is in an area with generally high potential for crop production. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides a Corn Suitability Rating (CSR) to rank soil productivity. The rating system ranges from a low of 5 to a high of 100. A CSR higher than 83 is considered very productive soil. The average crop yield in this category is 193 bushels per acres based on estimates from 2018 to 2021. A CSR of 65 to 82 is considered productive soil with properties that limit yield. The average crop yield is 188 bushels per acre. A CSR below 65 contains the same description as the previous category but has an average yield of 176 bushels per acre.[32]

Baxter and the surrounding areas have generally high CSR ratings. Areas north and northeast of town have the highest ratings and areas east and west of town have lower ratings due to the local watershed.



Assets

Productive Soils & A Strong Farming Culture

Many farms in and around Baxter are family-owned and have been for generations. This long-term land ownership adds to the tight-knit culture within Baxter. The farming culture comes with a strong sense of pride and work ethic.

Needs

Collaboration With Farmers

As Baxter looks to grow its economy through the addition of housing and commercial and industrial job opportunities, land acquisition will be necessary. Baxter's farming families play an important role in the future of the community, and they should be included in any discussions about future growth. The community's core value of Growing Together will be essential during these discussions to remember that growth should be intentional, and that agricultural production and community growth can happen in tandem with one another. While some acquisition of agricultural land will be necessary for growth, residents have no desire to become a booming suburb that rapidly acquires large swaths of land.

Dark Sky Protection

Many residents choose to live in Baxter because the small-town feel is quiet and peaceful. This also comes with a closer connection to nature both during the day at parks and on trails and at night through visual connection with the night sky. Being able to see the stars and planets in detail is unique to residents of small towns and rural areas and some residents are keenly aware of the value it adds to their lives. An ordinance for residential and business lighting is important to promote dark sky viewing.

"We would have a nice view of the night sky from our property but three of our neighbors have porch lights that penetrate not only into our yard but into interior rooms even on the second floor. They are much too bright and there's no shield on them so the light trespasses into adjacent yards and homes."
~Resident via Online Survey

Hazard Mitigation[34]

Hazards are unavoidable aspects of life, but planning and mitigation are vital to build resilient communities that can bounce back from any disaster. In January 2021, the Jasper County Emergency Management Agency began work with the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) to complete the county's Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plan was approved by both the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEMD) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with an effective period running from March 7, 2023, to March 6, 2028. The plan identifies natural, technological, and human-caused hazards; critical facilities; vulnerable populations; and operations and resources in each community. Mitigation strategies and action plans provide each community with tangible steps to improve resiliency ahead of any hazards. Furthermore, FEMA approval of the plan makes the county eligible for pre- and post- disaster mitigation funding.

Fifteen hazards were identified and assessed within Jasper County and individual communities were asked to help prioritize the hazards based on local conditions and needs. The priority levels and Baxter's priorities are included below.

Hazard Priority Level		
Hazard Priority		**Description**
1	High	Risk assessment score is high relative to other hazards; hazards may have occurred recently with severe impacts and long-term recovery; the hazard is generally a high priority in the community; the planning committee will identify potential mitigation projects
2	Medium	Risk assessment score is mid-range relative to other hazards; mitigation actions for hazards may already be complete or in progress; the hazards is generally a medium priority in the community; the planning committee will identify potential mitigation projects that may also address other hazards
3	Low	Risk assessment score is low relative to other hazards; mitigation actions for hazards may already be complete; the hazard is generally a low priority in the community; the planning committee may discuss potential mitigation projects

Six mitigation strategies were identified for Baxter including:

1. Develop a roster of people in the community who require medical devices
2. Purchase and install backup generators for lift station
3. Identify and/or complete water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure improvements
4. Educate the public about hazards that can impact Baxter
5. Purchase and install additional storm siren
6. Purchase message board to provide hazard-related information to the public

The first four mitigation strategies were given an action priority level 1, indicating that the projects should be completed in a 1-5 year time horizon. The last two were given action priority levels of 2, indicating that the projects should be completed in 5-10 years.

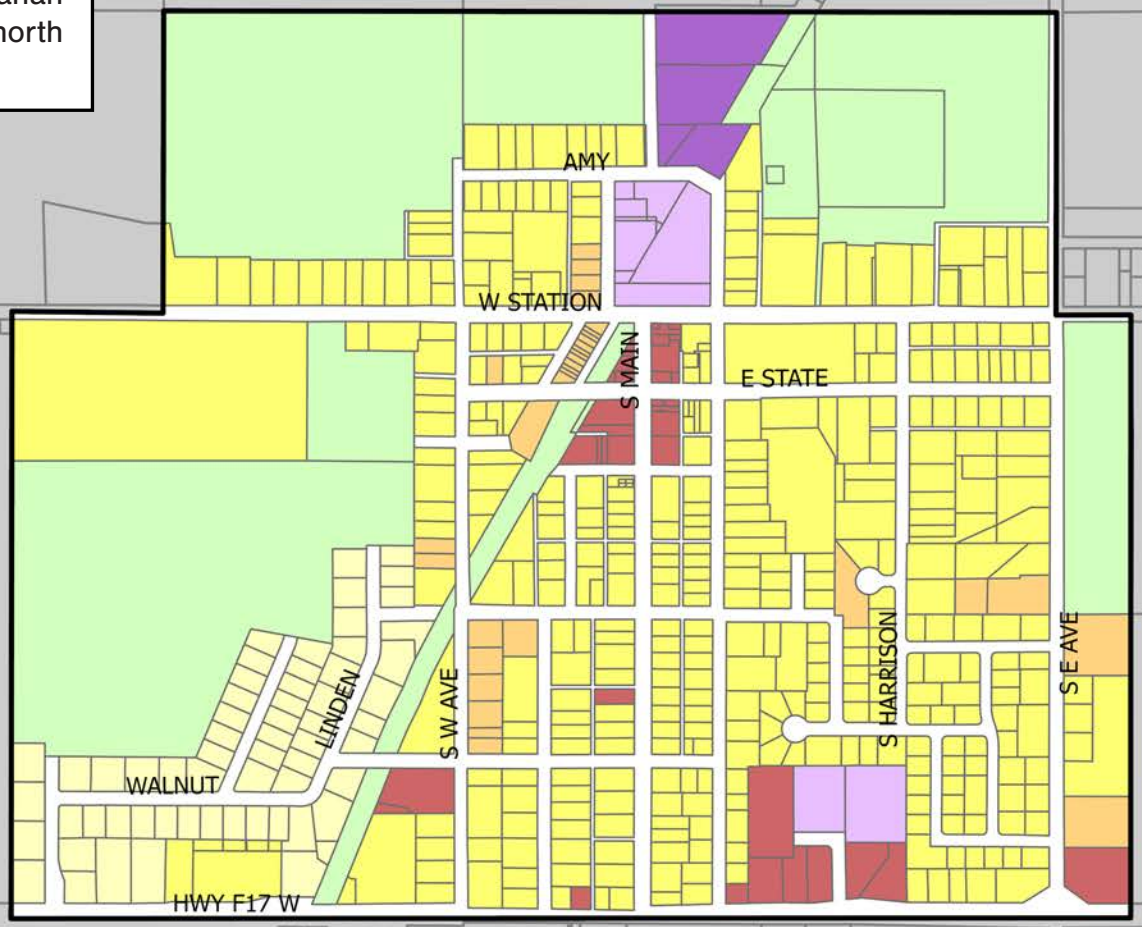
Fifteen hazards were identified and assessed within Jasper County, and individual communities were asked to help prioritize the hazards based on local conditions and needs.

Baxter Hazard Prioritization		
Hazard	**2017-2021 Priority Level**	**2022-2027 Priority Level**
Animal, Plant, and Crop Disease	3	3
Drought	2	3
Extreme Heat	2	3
Flash Flood	3	3
River Flood	Excluded	Excluded
Human Disease	Excluded	Excluded
Severe Winter Storm	1	2
Thunderstorm, Lightning, and Hail	2	1
Tornado and Windstorm	1	2
Hazardous Materials Incident	Excluded	Excluded
Infrastructure Failure	Excluded	Excluded
Levee and Dam Failure	Excluded	Excluded
Radiological Incident	Excluded	Excluded
Transportation Incident	Excluded	Excluded
Terrorism	Excluded	Excluded

Land Use

Based on Baxter's zoning, residential parcels make up 55.2% of the land within the city. Agricultural parcels make up the next largest portion at 36.2%. Commercial parcels are concentrated downtown and along E Buchanan Street while industrial parcels are mainly located north of downtown.

Zoning District	District Description	Percent of Land in Baxter
A-1	Agriculture/Open Space	36.2%
C-1	Central Business	4.3%
I-1	Light Industrial	2.5%
I-2	Heavy Industrial	1.8%
R-1	Low Density Residential	45.2%
R-1A	Residential Acreage	7.2%
R-2	High Density Residential	2.8%



Baxter City Boundary

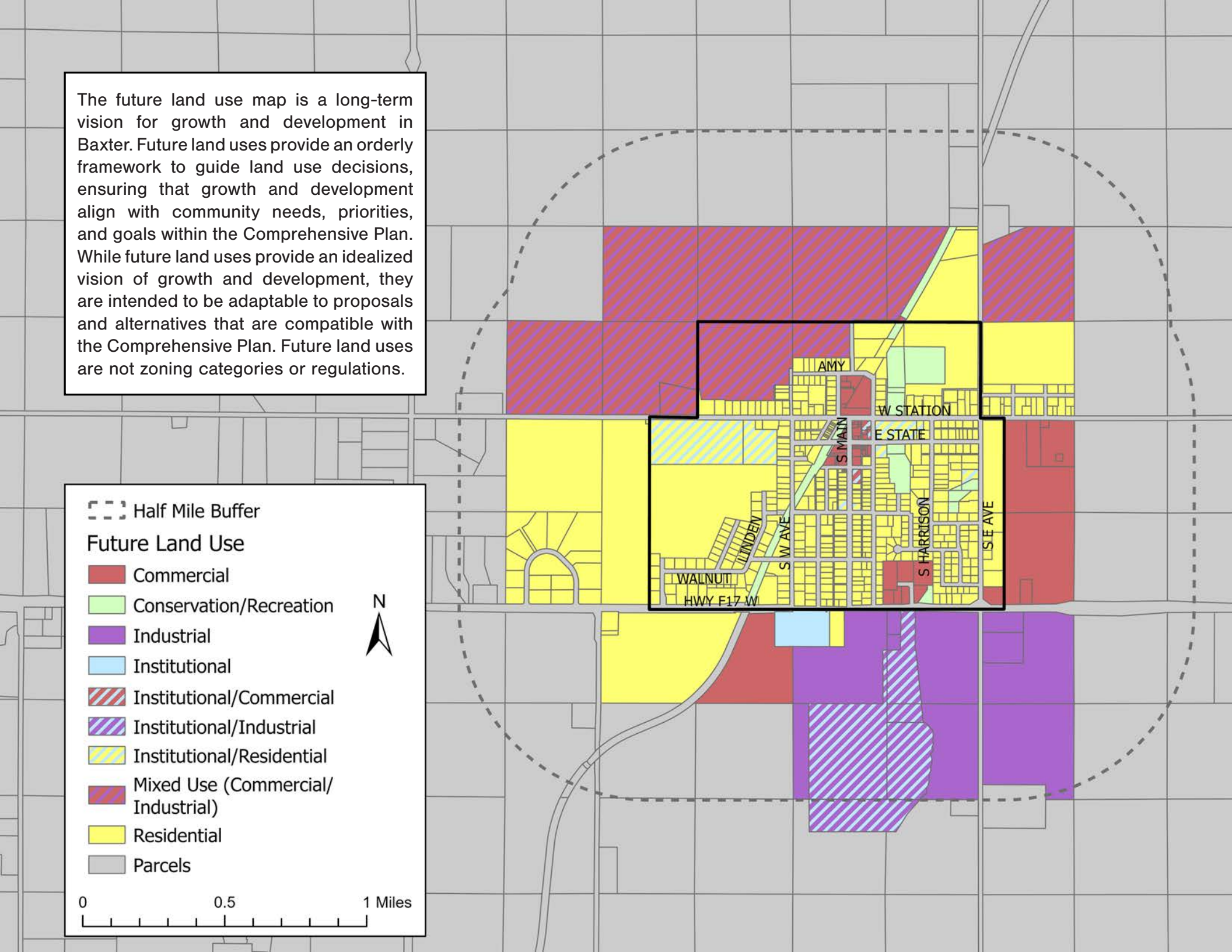
Zoning District

- A-1
- C-1
- I-1
- I-2
- R-1
- R-1A
- R-2

N

0 0.25 0.5 Miles

The future land use map is a long-term vision for growth and development in Baxter. Future land uses provide an orderly framework to guide land use decisions, ensuring that growth and development align with community needs, priorities, and goals within the Comprehensive Plan. While future land uses provide an idealized vision of growth and development, they are intended to be adaptable to proposals and alternatives that are compatible with the Comprehensive Plan. Future land uses are not zoning categories or regulations.



Future Land Use Categories

Commercial

Includes a range of retail, office, entertainment, and service uses for residents and visitors.

Conservation/Recreation

Includes recreational opportunities, protection of natural resources, and preservation of scenic or cultural amenities. Development in this future land use category is limited but may include improvements for active and passive recreation, environmental education, or natural conservation.

Industrial

Includes manufacturing, processing, warehousing and distribution, and utility production. Developments in this future land use category are generally located along major paved transportation corridors to facilitate the movement of materials and good and have mitigated impacts with adjacent land uses, especially residential or commercial.

Institutional

Includes public and semi-public facilities that serve a community purpose, including government buildings, emergency services, community centers, schools, libraries, places of worship, cemeteries, and sewage treatment facilities. In many cases, institutional uses will remain in place for decades. However, if an institutional use changes owners or use, the land should match neighboring uses. The future land use map indicates this through multi-colored markers. For example, if the Baxter School District were to grow and acquire new land for an expanded school, the former site should be used for residential land use.

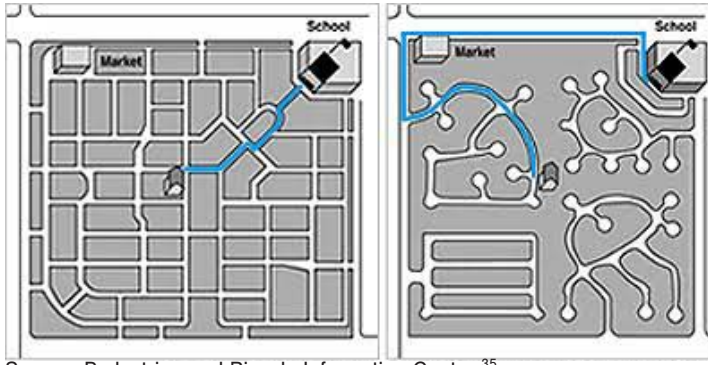
Residential

Includes low to high density housing including single-family, duplexes, townhomes, multi-family, and other housing developments. These residences should be served by public water and sewer systems in addition to other urban development characteristics such as paved roadways, curb and gutter, and sidewalks.

Best Practices

As Baxter grows and attracts additional businesses, rezoning will be necessary. Both the Planning & Zoning Commission and the City Council should reference the zoning ordinance to understand the full capacity of rezoning decisions. While a specific business may be in mind during a rezoning, the process of rezoning opens the land up to a number of permitted uses. For example, rezoning a parcel of land to heavy industrial with a desire to build a car repair shop also opens the land up to canning factories, gasoline distribution plants, grain elevators, power substations, manufacturing, trucking firms, and more. These uses are not compatible with residential or recreational uses. Often times, commercial uses are used between residential and industrial uses to provide a barrier, or industrial uses are completely separated from residential districts. Setbacks and barriers like trees and fences can also separate more intensive uses. In summary, a rezoning decision lasts for decades and may outlast a specific business. The overall use should be considered during rezonings.

Community growth will also require extending roads and utilities. The geographic core of Baxter is mainly comprised of grid streets that loop and intersect. This design is intentional and cost effective, providing efficient, looped water and sewer systems; more homes per foot of utilities; walkability from residential districts to community amenities; and ease of snow plowing in the winter. Cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets do not provide these benefits and should be avoided in future developments.



Source: Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center [35]

Annexation

Annexation is the process by which a city adds nearby land into its city limits. For communities with compact development, like Baxter, annexation can be necessary for future growth. Infill development is limited in the community, and once periphery parcels are developed, Baxter will have few options for growth. For Baxter, any future annexations would be considered "Not Within an Urbanized Area" as the City of Baxter is not within two miles of another urbanized area. There are three options for annexation:

- 100% Voluntary: all landowners in a territory adjoining Baxter agree in writing to be annexed into the city
- 80/20 Voluntary: at least 80% of landowners in a territory adjoining Baxter agree in writing to being annexed into the city
- Involuntary: a city seeks annexation without the consent of at least 80% of landowners

100% voluntary annexation is ideal, but 80/20 may be necessary to prevent irregular city boundaries or "islands" of unincorporated land. Involuntary annexation is not recommended and can be long and costly. A city looking at involuntary annexation needs to prove that the annexation serves the public interest and is not being done purely to increase tax revenue.[36] Baxter should pursue voluntary annexation at any location on the city boundary when the opportunity is available. With long standing family farms, land sales and voluntary annexation opportunities may only happen every couple of decades. The City should seize growth prospects when possible.

Implementation

The following action items are directly related to comments made throughout the public engagement period. The action items were chosen based on their ability to meet resident needs and make lasting impacts. Short-term projects can be accomplished in 1-3 years, medium-term in 4-6 years, and long-term in 7-10 years.

Communication & Transparency | Action Through Partnership | Empowering All Learners | Growing Together

Action	Timeline	Lead	Core Value
Communication & Transparency			
Continue posting major updates (big items from City Council meetings, projects, etc.) on City social media and other offline platforms to increase transparency.	Ongoing	City Staff	
Include all ordinances on the City website. Consider using an online, searchable platform.	Short-Term	City Staff	
Provide public education on taxes and utilities in the utility bill. Where do taxes go? Where do they not go (examples of projects that are grant funded or completed by other orgs)?	Annually	City Staff	
Work with Jasper County Sheriff and Baxter Fire/EMS to report on response times annually. With the loss of Baxter PD, there is a perception of slow response times.	Annually	City Staff	
Host annual or quarterly “Coffee with a Councilor” for community members to share thoughts and concerns with the City Council.	Quarterly	City Council	
Revitalize the quarterly strategy meetings between the City, school, Chamber, Hometown Pride, BEDCO, and other community organizations. Use the meeting to align initiatives and move projects forward.	Quarterly	City Staff	

Communication & Transparency | Action Through Partnership | Empowering All Learners | Growing Together

Action	Timeline	Lead	Core Value
Leadership, Volunteerism, & Welcoming			
Work with community organizations to provide students with a list of volunteer opportunities within Baxter for the Silver Cord program.	Short-Term	Baxter School District	
Publish a “get involved” newsletter or include volunteer opportunities in an existing newsletter.	Short-Term	Hometown Pride	
Host a career fair for high schoolers & community visitors.	Short-Term	Baxter School District	
Provide a concise set of steps for becoming an EMS and fire department volunteer. Include the steps on the city website, on social media, and on flyers throughout town.	Short-Term	Fire & Rescue	
Explore opportunities for youth involvement in local government. This could include a Student City Councilor or a student group to write a city-wide newsletter.	Short-Term	City Council Hometown Pride	
Provide a welcome class to introduce new residents to Baxter. Give them details of city services, businesses in town, and other essentials while avoiding bias. Consider new ways to reach new residents.	Annually	Hometown Pride	
Include advisory member representation on organization boards for other local community organizations. For example, BEDCO should have an advisory, non-voting member of the Chamber on their board and vice versa.	Short-Term	All Community Organizations	

Communication & Transparency | Action Through Partnership | Empowering All Learners | Growing Together

Action	Timeline	Lead	Core Value
Economic Development			
Adopt a vacant building ordinance to track vacancies – particularly downtown.	Short-Term	City Staff	
Maintain a map of vacant commercial spaces ready for development or redevelopment.	Short-Term	BEDCO	
Explore opportunities for a business incubator or other small spaces (ex. Jewell vendor village) for new business owners to trial their start-up in Baxter.	Medium-Term	BEDCO	
Explore a local currency program like “Baxter Bucks” to keep spending local.	Medium-Term	Chamber	
Conduct annual business retention and expansion visits to understand business needs and opportunities.	Short-Term	Chamber	
Ask business owners what challenges they’re facing or what they’d like to learn about. Host Chamber nights with speakers on those topics or work with the City to alleviate any City-related barriers.	Short-Term	Chamber	
Create a page on the city website for potential business owners that highlights the benefits of living and working in the city. List the steps for opening a business in Baxter.	Short-Term	BEDCO	
Establish an endowment fund in Baxter to capture community wealth.	Medium-Term	BEDCO	
Include a pamphlet at the trailhead marketing Baxter and its local businesses.	Short-Term	Chamber	
Try out different beautification efforts like window boxes, decorative lighting, painted doors, or small outdoor seating to encourage more residents and visitors to stop by businesses.	Medium-Term	Business Owners	
Continue collaborating with the Jasper County Economic Development Corporation (JEDCO) to align Baxter's goals and actions with regional growth opportunities and to capitalize on JEDCO funding streams.	Short-Term	BEDCO	

Communication & Transparency | Action Through Partnership | Empowering All Learners | Growing Together

Action	Timeline	Lead	Core Value
Recreation & Mobility			
Connect Westfield Horizons to the sports complex via a sidewalk or multi-use path.	Medium-Term	City	Communication & Transparency, Growing Together
Complete the Visioning Report projects – especially the Station Street multi-use path from the Sports Complex to the Chad Flora Fields.	Long-Term	City	Communication & Transparency, Action Through Partnership, Growing Together
Pursue grant funding for trailhead improvements. Collaborate with Friends of Chichaqua and/or Iowa Bike Coalition to determine the best amenities for bike riders and trail users.	Medium-Term	Hometown Pride	Action Through Partnership, Growing Together
Continue engaging with Jasper County Conservation to encourage repairs along the Chichaqua Valley Trail.	Medium-Term	Hometown Pride	Action Through Partnership, Growing Together
Explore and pursue opportunities to include public art and creative spaces in Baxter. Start with smaller projects like a sculpture at the trailhead or a mural at the intersection of State Street and Main Street.	Short-Term	Hometown Pride	Action Through Partnership, Growing Together
Spread money evenly between girls and boys sports and arts, culture, and music programs. Encourage collaboration between athletic and music booster clubs.	Short-Term	Baxter School District	Action Through Partnership, Empowering All Learners, Growing Together
Explore becoming a Tree City community according to Tree City USA's standards.	Short-Term	Gardening Club	Action Through Partnership, Growing Together
Establish a community garden in Giese Park.	Short-Term	Gardening Club	Action Through Partnership, Empowering All Learners, Growing Together
Explore options for adding a Recreation Center to the community. Establish a fundraising campaign to fund the project.	Long-Term	Baxter Rec	Action Through Partnership, Growing Together
Review the City's lighting ordinance or adopt one if one does not exist. Educate residents on dark sky protection and the lighting ordinance through a newsletter or the utility bill.	Medium-Term	City Staff	Action Through Partnership, Empowering All Learners, Growing Together

Communication & Transparency | Action Through Partnership | Empowering All Learners | Growing Together

Action	Timeline	Lead	Core Value
City Services			
Maintain and execute a Capital Improvements Plan for major capital improvement projects in the next 5-10 years.	Short-Term	City	
Review the existing property maintenance ordinance and explore amendments to better address property needs.	Medium-Term	City	

Housing & Land Use			
Reach out to local developers to pursue additional housing in Baxter – particularly senior housing options. Market the BEDCO owned land.	Medium-Term	BEDCO	
Work with local realtors to understand what types of housing are most sought after.	Short-Term	BEDCO	
Pursue a mixed housing development in the 39 acres owned by BEDCO (small single-family, large single-family, rentals, senior housing, etc.).	Long-Term	BEDCO	
Amend the City's zoning ordinance to mention State Code §364.3.23, allowing accessory dwelling units on single family lots.	Medium-Term	City	
Meet with farmers who own land adjacent to the built-out portions of the town to determine if they would consider selling portions of land.	Short-Term	BEDCO	
Pursue voluntary annexation opportunities when they are available. Use the future land use map to prioritize areas for annexation, if possible (e.g. try to annex land labeled industrial on the future land use map if industrial development is desired).	Long-Term	City	
Prioritize gridded and looped streets instead of cul-de-sacs in future development to improve walkability and access.	Ongoing	City	

Action	Timeline	Lead	Core Value
Implementation			
Review these action items annually at quarterly meetings to confirm project leads and understand what progress has been made or what challenges are being faced.	Annually	City Staff	
Review the Hazard Mitigation Plan mitigation strategies annually at quarterly meetings to determine project leads and steps to implementing the strategies.	Annually	City Staff	

Continual Improvement

The Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle is a systematic process for implementing changes, gathering feedback, and iterating on the changes for continual improvement. This process can be helpful in understanding how to use this Comprehensive Plan for the most impact.

Plan

This plan serves as a "living document" for Baxter including the City and the numerous organizations that will help with implementation. The City Council and all boards and commissions should get familiar with this document and reference the Comprehensive Plan when making decisions. The future land use map should serve as a guide for all zoning decisions. Additionally, BEDCO, the Chamber of Commerce, Hometown Pride, the Baxter School District, and other organizations should use this document to coordinate and guide decision making.

Do

With the Boost Report, Visioning Report, and Comprehensive Plan in hand, the next major step is coordinating action. At the next Baxter Quarterly Meeting (with BEDCO, Chamber, Hometown Pride, and the City), community leaders should ensure that "Lead" organizations are appropriate for the identified actions. From there, each organization should take at least one meeting to prioritize actions for implementation in the first year.

With first year actions in mind, each organization should identify any partners and resources needed. While the actions have a "Lead", this does not mean that action should take place independently. Coordination is essential for future success. Finally, identify the targets and measures the organization will use to measure process toward the action.

Study

The Baxter Quarterly Meeting can be used to monitor progress on Comprehensive Plan implementation. Organizations should report on targets and measures toward action implementation. The meeting can also be used to identify barriers and brainstorm strategies for overcoming said barriers.

Act

Just as Baxter is growing and evolving, so can this plan. Some actions will work well and create needed change while other will be met with unavoidable barriers. Baxter's organizations have three options at their fingertips for each and every action:

- Adopt practices that fit the community and create needed change. Formalize them, as able.
- Adapt good practices that need improvement. Document barriers, identify potential solutions, and continue to iterate.
- Abandon existing practices that don't support progress and new initiatives that don't fit Baxter. Not all practices will be suitable for Baxter. Document why the practice was not successful for future leaders to learn from.

"All the different communities/groups/etc. need to be on the same page, set goals, and start." ~Resident at final Open House

"Everyone take a breath and remember we're all rowing the same boat." ~Resident at final Open House

CENTRAL IOWA TRAILS
Chichaqua Valley Trail
Ira 4.8 Miles
Mingo 9.0 Miles
Valeria 13.8 Miles
Bondurant 22.3 Miles
JASPER COUNTY CONSERVATION
(641)792-9780

Funding

The following funding sources could support Baxter in implementing the provided action items. Grant opportunities are subject to change from year to year. Local leaders should verify grant opportunities and ensure that the project at hand meets eligibility requirements prior to applying.

CDBG = Community Development Block Grant
CIRTPA = Central Iowa Regional Transportation Planning Alliance
DOT = Department of Transportation
JEDCO = Jasper County Economic Development Corporation
CIHTF = Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund
DNR = Department of Natural Resources
EDA = Economic Development Administration
IEDA = Iowa Economic Development Authority

City Services

Program	Organization	Description
Community Development & Facilities Fund (CDBG)	IEDA	Helps Iowa communities strengthen essential public spaces and expand access to high-quality communities amenities. Current programs include Community Facilities (day care, food pantry, etc.) and Pocket Parks.
Food Storage Capacity Grant	Iowa DNR	Provides food storage facilities (shelving, refrigerators, freezers, etc.) for food pantries, food banks, and other entities that serve food-insecure Iowans.
Public Safety Foundation Grants	Firehouse Subs	Public safety funding for lifesaving equipment, prevention education, scholarships and continued education, disaster relief, and support for members of the military.
Water, Sewer, Stormwater Fund (CDBG)	IEDA	Funds to assist cities and counties with projects such as sanitary sewer and water system improvements, treatment facility projects, rural water connections, and stormwater conveyances.

Housing

Affordable Housing Program	Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines	Encourages partnerships between member financial institutions and local housing providers to secure funds for the purchase, construction, or rehabilitation of affordable homeownership or rental housing units.
Housing Rehabilitation Fund (CDBG)	IEDA	Programs to support communities in expanding and preserving quality housing options within their downtowns and established neighborhoods. Current programs include Upper Story Housing and Roofing Replacement.

Housing (continued)

Program	Organization	Description
LMI Housing Program	CIHTF	Funds a variety of projects in Boone, Jasper, Marion and Warren counties including, but not limited to, owner-occupied rehabilitation, renter-occupied rehabilitation and new construction, energy efficiency and weatherization improvements, natural disaster temporary shelter, domestic abuse shelters, and homeless shelters.
Rural Innovation Grant Program	IEDA	Seeks to support creative ideas that address current issues and challenges faced by rural communities. The current opportunity aims to increase available housing stock by leveraging funding programs, driving private investment, and rewarding creative solutions.

Recreation & Mobility

Community Challenge Grant	AARP	Quick-action grants to help make communities more livable for people of all ages. Includes permanent physical improvements; temporary demonstrations; and new, innovative programming pilots or services.
Resource Enhancement & Protection (REAP) Program	Iowa DNR	Recreational and natural resource projects, including trails, water recreation, open space development, natural areas, and acquisition projects.
Small Communities Fund	CIRTPA	Provides funding for roadway and bridge projects on federal functional classification roadways.
Traffic Engineering Assistance Program (TEAP)	Iowa DOT	Provides 100 hours of engineering assistance for operations and traffic safety issues.
Traffic Safety Grant	Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau	Reimburseable grants to develop and implement strategies to reduce death and injury on Iowa's roads.
Traffic Safety Improvement Program (TSIP)	Iowa DOT	Funding for roadway safety improvements, traffic control devices, studies, and outreach.
Transportation Alternatives Program	CIRTPA	Provides funding for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including recreational trail, safe routes to school, and improving non-driver access to public transportation.
Urban Forestry Grant	Iowa DNR	Reimburseable grants to complete community forestry plans, urban food forests, educational programming, and forestry internships

Program	Organization	Description
Childcare Planning Grant	IEDA	Provides communities with the information needed to take proactive steps toward addressing childcare challenges.
Community Betterment Grant Program	Prairie Meadows	Grants ranging from $100 to $99,999 to support projects related to arts and culture, economic development, education, and health and human services.
Community Grants Program	Alliant Energy Foundation	Grants for playgrounds, health and wellness projects, public safety, education, culture and arts, and other local needs.
Downtown Revitalization Fund (CDBG)	IEDA	Funds to strengthen the economic and social vitality of Iowa's downtown districts. Current programs include Commercial Facades & Streetscapes.
Enhance Iowa Community Attraction & Tourism (CAT)	IEDA	Assists projects that provide recreational, cultural, entertainment, and educational attractions, as well as sports tourism. Used primarily for vertical infrastructure (land acquisition, construction, utilities, etc.).
Facade Improvement Program	JEDCO	Matching funds for business owners within the downtown commercial areas in JEDCO member communities for facade improvements.
Iowans Create Community Mural Program	Iowa Arts Council	Matches a selected Iowa artist and community to plan, design, and create an original mural that showcases the community's unique creative and cultural identity and builds civic pride and engagement.
Jasper County Community Foundation	Jasper Community Foundation	Broad, flexible purpose assisting arts and culture, economic development, education, environment, health and human services, recreation areas and other high-impact community opportunities.
Paint Iowa Beautiful	Keep Iowa Beautiful	Provides free paint to a wide variety of public service and community betterment projects throughout Iowa.
Public Works Grants	U.S. EDA	Catalytic investments to help distressed communities build, design, or engineer critical infrastructure and facilities that will help implement regional development strategies.
Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy (RISE)	Iowa DOT	Establishment, construction, and improvement of roads for value-adding activities like industrial, manufacturing, warehousing, and professional office developments.
Small Grants Program	JEDCO	Financial assistance to JEDCO member communities for economic development projects that increase the property tax base or create jobs.

City Resolution

CITY OF BAXTER

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-28

RESOLUTION ADOPTING CITY OF BAXTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2026-2046

BE IT ENACTED by the City Council of Baxter, Iowa:

WHEREAS, the City Code of Baxter, Iowa, Chapter 1, entitled Planning and Zoning Commission, provides full power and authority to the Commission to make or cause to be made a comprehensive plan of the whole or any portion of the municipality or of any land outside thereof; and

WHEREAS, in order to promote and manage the pace, location, and impacts of growth and development in Baxter over the next twenty (20) years, the city retained the Mid-Iowa Planning Alliance (MIPA) to prepare a comprehensive plan for the City of Baxter; and

WHEREAS, MIPA staff, city staff, members of the Planning and Zoning Commission, members of the steering committee, and many citizens worked diligently to prepare the proposed comprehensive plan for the city; and

WHEREAS, the City of Baxter actively promoted the comprehensive planning process and encouraged community involvement through multiple engagement opportunities, including: an online community survey; stakeholder interviews; community events; steering committee meetings, a Planning and Zoning Commission public hearing, and City Council meetings;

WHEREAS, the City of Baxter, Iowa, published a Class 1 public notice and held one public hearing on September 22, 2026, before adopting a comprehensive plan; and

WHEREAS, the comprehensive plan has been completed, reviewed, and recommended for approval by the Planning and Zoning Commission on September 22, 2026, by a vote of 5-0 is now before the City Council for final review and approval.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Baxter Comprehensive Plan 2026-2046, is hereby approved and adopted as the City of Baxter's Comprehensive Plan, thereby replacing the previous plan.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the City Council this 12th day of October 2026.

CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF
BAXTER IOWA

DANIEL KUNKEL, MAYOR
CITY OF BAXTER, IA

ATTEST:

JILL BRAYE, CITY ADMINISTRATOR/CLERK
CITY OF BAXTER, IOWA

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