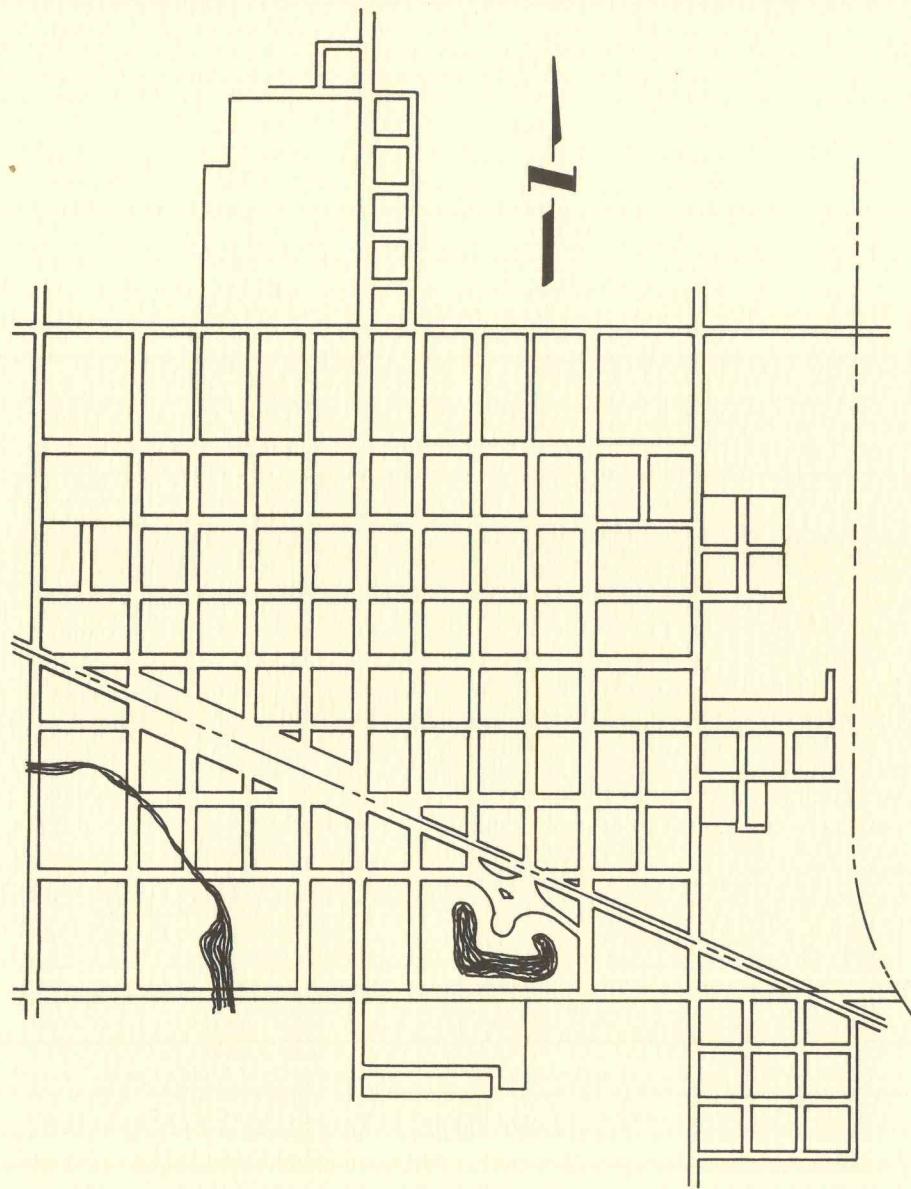


# Sterling, Kansas



## Comprehensive Plan

**The Old West Partnership**

PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS



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The preparation of this report was financially aided through a federal grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development under the Community Planning Assistance Program authorized by Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954, as amended. The report was prepared in cooperation with the Mid State Regional Planning Commission and the Sterling City Planning Commission.



## INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Plan for Sterling is a document which has been prepared to assist local citizens and elected officials as they work for the improvement of the quality of life in Sterling. The plan provides a guide to the resolution of the various issues and problems which are expected to affect Sterling's future. Some of the issues which are addressed by the plan have been identified by study of trends in population change and economic development. Other issues have been discussed as a result of an analysis of the condition and capabilities of the physical characteristics of the community, such as community facilities and existing land use. A Background Information Report has been prepared as a separate document and it provides information on the socio-economic and physical characteristics which have contributed to the preparation of the Sterling Comprehensive Plan.

The Sterling Planning Commission has spent considerable time and effort in review of the background information in order to identify future needs and the best way in which to deal with those needs. Recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan have been proposed by the Planning Commission to provide a guide by which local citizens and their elected officials may work toward economical and orderly development to provide an attractive living environment.



# BACKGROUND DATA

Each of the following sections is designed to provide the investigator with a general background of the subject and his associates, and to furnish the investigator with the names and addresses of persons who may be helpful in the investigation.

Each section should be carefully read and a record made of the information contained in it. It is suggested that the investigator make a copy of the entire section and file it in the case.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION REVIEW

Detailed background information on socio-economic and physical characteristics has been discussed in the Background Information Report. The following information is a review of the existing conditions and expected growth factors which will affect the future development of Sterling.

### POPULATION

Sterling's population has shown a very slow growth trend during the past four decades. The 1979 population of 2,454 persons, including students at Sterling College, represents a 10.8% increase over the 1940 population.

The present population has a lower median age, 37, than the 1970 figure of 43. The number of persons over 75 years of age has also increased during the past decade.

For the most part, continued growth and a younger population should be the trend for Sterling in the future. The projection for Sterling indicates a year 2000 population of 2,545 persons. These trends will require that public services and facilities be maintained and upgraded on a regular basis.

### ECONOMIC TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

While the Sterling community will experience it's share of economic peak's and valley's, the future economic outlook is good. The major employers in the community forsee continued steady growth and expansion.

The community's trade area, while somewhat restricted by it's proximity to Hutchinson, does encompass much of south central Rice County and northwest Reno County. A positive point is that Sterling's local businesses seem to do well with smaller communities in Rice County even though they are competing with Lyons which has a more diversified retail and service sector.

While the general economic outlook for the community is good, there are two measures which should be implemented. They are:

1. Support of industrial growth and expansion.
2. Maintenance of the central business district is needed for Sterling to maintain it's competitive position in the area.

### HOUSING

In general the housing stock of Sterling is in good shape. A windshield survey of the community indicates that 54% of the units are in standard condition and only 10% could be considered dilapidated or in need of major repairs. Many of the substandard units are found in the southeast sector of the community.

The present city building codes are outdated. A national code should be adopted as soon as possible and reviewed annually.

Growth in the community over the next 20 years will result in a demand for over 110 residential units. Many of these units can be constructed on platted vacant lots already served by city utilities.

A problem which is not unique to Sterling is the lack of rental units in the community. All of the major employers cited the lack of rental housing as a negative factor.

Another problem is the proliferation of mobile homes on individual lots throughout the community. The present zoning ordinance permits this and should be amended to allow for tighter control of mobile homes.

#### COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The present public buildings in Sterling are adequate. They have been well maintained and can provide suitable space for the operation of the community in the foreseeable future.

The police and fire protection services in the community are in good shape. The only significant equipment needs are for better communication systems for the Police and Fire Department.

The present enrollment trends for USD #376, which serves Sterling and a 158 square mile area in Rice County, indicate that present facilities are adequate.

#### RECREATION

The Sterling community is fortunate to have a fine recreational area such as Sterling Lake Park. In conjunction with USD #376 and Sterling College, recreational opportunities and facilities ranging from tennis and racquetball to golf are available to residents.

#### TRANSPORTATION

The Sterling community is served by two state highways, K-96 and K-14. Over 2,000 vehicles per day use these highways in the Sterling area.

The community is also served by three freight lines and has Santa Fe Railroad grain and freight service.

In general, local streets within the City of Sterling are in good condition. There are a number of unpaved streets in the southeast sector of the community.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

There are no major environmental limitations, besides the defined floodplains, in the Sterling area. There are no significant wildlife habitats and no soil characteristics which will severely limit development in the area. The floodplain, as defined by the Flood Insurance Administration, does severely limit development in the southwest sector of the community.

## EXISTING LAND USE

Over 31% of the land area in Sterling is used for residential purposes. Commercial and industrial acreages total only 3.5% of the total land area. Streets, alleys and rights-of-way comprise 28% of the total land area.

The community will need an additional 12 acres of residential development to accommodate the year 2000 population. Commercial and industrial land development needed to accommodate the projected population will be insignificant.

# **PLANNING FACTORS**



## PLANNING FACTORS

The analysis of background information related to Sterling's socio-economic and physical characteristics has shown that an adequate base of infra-structure facilities and services exists to serve the anticipated demands of future development in Sterling. There are, however, certain issues which require consideration in order to enhance the quality of life in Sterling and encourage orderly development in the future. Discussed below are the planning factors, which when viewed in terms of existing conditions as they relate to expected growth of the community, identify the need for a planned approach to Sterling's future.

There are four major categories of the planning factors which identify the need for implementation activities to enhance the quality of life and encourage efficient and effective management of growth in Sterling. Recreation, housing, economic development, and growth management are the major factors which influence the development of Sterling's Comprehensive Plan. The plan recommendations presented in this document are based upon the need to address these four categories.

### RECREATION

Sterling Lake Park presently provides the major recreational facility for the City. Swimming, fishing, picnicing, tennis, and playground facilities are available. However, Sterling Lake Park's location in relationship to some residential areas of the community indicates the need for a neighborhood park in the northern part of town. The swimming facility at Sterling Lake has been adequate in the past but there is a growing need to seriously consider construction of a new swimming pool.

### HOUSING

Survey data has shown that the available housing stock in Sterling is generally in very good condition. There are three areas of the housing situation which do need specific action. Additional rental housing is needed to provide adequate housing for lower income families and to provide a housing alternative to new families moving in to work for Sterling's economic endeavors. While mobile homes provide an acceptable alternative to the cost of conventional housing, there is a need to insure that this type of housing is developed in a way which is consistent with existing development as well as the public health and safety. Finally, local building codes and ordinances should be updated to conform to recent technological and regulation changes in the national housing industry.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The economic base of Sterling and Rice County has provided a sound growth environment for local business and industry. Notwithstanding fluctuating national economic conditions, the local economy has maintained a solid footing and the future outlook is positive. To

perpetuate the favorable economic environment of Sterling there are two issues which need to be addressed. The first is related to housing discussed above in that housing for potential new workers is necessary in order to allow for growth in local industry. Preservation of the downtown area is needed in order to maintain a solid central business district. Strip development or peripheral commercial development should be discouraged to preserve the downtown area as the commercial center of town and prevent undesirable traffic and land use development patterns.

#### GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Present land use patterns provide Sterling with the opportunity to maintain a compatible mixture of land use types to the benefit of residential, commercial, and industrial users. In order to maintain orderly growth, several actions are required. The local land use regulations must be updated and expanded. Revision of the existing zoning ordinance and adoption of subdivision regulations will encourage continued orderly growth. Extraterritorial zoning should be adopted to insure that harmonious development occurs in the fringe areas of Sterling. Such zoning controls will also protect rurally oriented land uses from the growth pressures of urban development.

By addressing the planning factors identified above, the Sterling Comprehensive Plan provides a guideline by which the community may build upon its present base to provide an attractive living environment. Plan recommendations will be directed towards the fulfillment of the needs identified by the planning factors. Implementation of these recommendations will insure that Sterling moves forward in a logical manner which recognizes the adequacy of present facilities and services as well as the need for improvement in certain areas.



## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The analysis of background information has led to the identification of the planning factors which will have a significant effect on the future of Sterling. Based upon the background review and the planning factors, the major issues in Sterling's future have been identified. In order to outline a course of action for the orderly and planned resolution of these issues, it is beneficial to set forth desired accomplishments in the form of Goals and Objectives. Goal statements identify the long range aims and are stated in general terms. Objectives identify the implementation activities which need to be undertaken and collectively will lead to accomplishment of the Goals. Once the Goals and Objectives have been formulated it is then possible to present recommendations on measures needed to attain those Goals, thus providing a plan which will address the major issues affecting Sterling's future growth and development. The Goals and Objectives of the Sterling Comprehensive Plan are stated below.

### GOAL 1: Provide adequate recreational facilities for all citizens of Sterling.

Objectives: A. Improve Mary's Park to provide a neighborhood park and playground facility.

B. Improve and maintain the facilities at Sterling Lake Park.

C. Initiate a feasibility study concerning the potential location and cost for a swimming pool.

### GOAL 2: Expand the supply of housing in Sterling.

Objectives: A. Support the Sterling Housing Authority in the development of assisted rental housing.

B. Adopt regulations which provide for the development of mobile home parks and eliminate the proliferation of single lot mobile homes in "R-1" zoning districts.

C. Identify vacant lots presently served by public facilities in order to promote their development so as to reduce the cost of new housing construction.

D. Update building codes and ordinances to encourage energy efficiency in building construction.

### GOAL 3: Promote expansion of employment and economic development in Sterling.

Objectives: A. Preserve the central business district as the principal commercial area.

B. Develop a local economic development effort based on the expansion and promotion of existing and local industries.

GOAL 4: Insure that public facilities continue to adequately serve the community.

Objectives:

- A. Improve the communications systems of the Police and Fire Departments.
- B. Develop a street maintenance and improvement program.
- C. Continue to assess the feasibility of constructing a water tower and alteration of the floodplain hazards affecting Sterling.

GOAL 5: Provide for the orderly growth and development of Sterling.

Objectives:

- A. Implement the future land use plan through revisions to the zoning ordinance and adoption of subdivision regulations.
- B. Implement extra-territorial zoning regulations to insure compatibility of urban and rural land uses.
- C. Formulate a continuing planning program for refinement of the Comprehensive Plan.
- D. Continue to cooperate with the Kansas Energy Agency.

The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to identify the implementation activities necessary to resolve present and expected problems or deficiencies in public facilities and services as well as the socio-economic environment. Study of background information identifies future community needs which can be stated in terms of Goals and Objectives. The Goals and Objectives become the implementation outline for the plan by setting forth the particular actions needed to improve the social and physical environment. With the Goals and Objectives identified, the final section of the Comprehensive Plan presents recommendations which, if implemented, will insure that the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is realized.



# PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

## PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The Background Information report has provided the basis for identification of planning Goals and Objectives for Sterling. With needed future activities outlined by the Goals and Objectives, the Comprehensive Plan recommendations are presented to identify actions which may be implemented in the next ten to twenty years to meet the expected needs of Sterling as it continues to grow. Discussed below are recommendations related to the Goals and Objectives which, if implemented, will insure that the Comprehensive Plan fulfills its purpose to provide a planned approach to the future of Sterling.

### RECREATION

Goal 1 identifies the need for expanded recreational facilities. To meet the needs outlined by Goal 1 there are three implementation measures identified by the Objectives. Development of Mary's Park, improvement and maintenance of Sterling Lake Park, and study of the feasibility of constructing a swimming pool are the planning objectives which, if attained, will meet future needs for recreational facilities. Identified below are the implementation activities which will lead to the fulfillment of those objectives.

Mary's Park - Provision of playground equipment at this park will provide readily accessible recreational facilities for residents in north Sterling. Playground equipment provided should include such items as a swing set, teeter-totter, and other playground equipment as well as one or two picnic tables. Developing Mary's Park as a neighborhood park should not cost any more than three thousand dollars.

Sterling Lake Park - Improvement and maintenance of this recreational facility will insure adequate recreational facilities for Sterling. Improvements needed include resurfacing of the tennis courts and construction of a picnic pavilion for use in inclement weather and for use by large groups. Maintenance of existing facilities is needed as follows: repair existing playground equipment, general maintenance of bathhouse, repair and replacement of picnic facilities as needed. Estimated cost of improvements and maintenance at Sterling Lake Park is:

1. Repair Existing Equipment	\$ 2,500.00
2. Resurface Tennis Courts	\$10,000.00
3. Construct Picnic Pavilion	\$ 5,000.00
	\$17,500.00
Contingencies of 20%	\$ 3,500.00
	\$21,000.00

Swimming Pool - The feasibility of constructing a swimming pool should be studied as soon as funds are available in order to identify potential costs as well as possible sites for such a facility. Construction of a swimming pool would alleviate concerns over the potential of health hazards related to the lake's water quality. Additionally a pool facility may enhance fishi

quality at the lake and lead to better use of the total lake area. A study committee should be appointed by the City Commission to determine size, type, and location of a swimming pool. It is recommended that the pool be located in Sterling Lake Park so that the present bathhouse facilities may be used.

The above recommendations for recreational improvements are designed to promote the development of accessible and adequate recreational facilities in accordance with the Objectives of Goal 1. Financing of the recommended improvements could come from the annual budget or some grant assistance may be available on a matching basis of 50% local funds for 50% grant funds under the auspices of the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. To insure that justification for the above improvements is documented, the City should submit the above recommendations for inclusion in the State Plan.

#### HOUSING

Expansion of the supply of housing for present and future residents of Sterling is the need identified by Goal 2. Goal 2 Objectives identify assisted housing, mobile home regulations, use of vacant lots, and updated building codes as the implementation measures needed to accomplish the stated Goal.

Assisted Housing - The Sterling Housing Authority received approval in 1980 for 16 additional units of assisted housing. These units will meet the housing needs of lower income families over the next five to seven years. In 1985 it is recommended that lower income housing needs be reassessed and if additional units are needed, the City should support the development of such additional units.

Regulation of Mobile Homes - The location and density of mobile home uses should be managed through the implementation of specific mobile home regulations. Mobile homes on single lots often contribute to the viability of certain neighborhoods while in other areas they may detract from existing development values. Therefore, it is recommended that present zoning regulations be amended to exclude mobile homes from lower density residential areas. Mobile homes on single lots should be accommodated in high density residential districts and a special district regulation for mobile home parks should be adopted. The mobile home park regulations should require that site development plans be approved by the Planning Commission prior to construction and the density of mobile home parks should be set forth. The implementation of mobile home regulations should be accomplished by 1981.

Use of Vacant Lots for New Housing - There are numerous vacant lots in Sterling which may be economically converted to housing uses since public facilities already serve the areas in which they are located. The City should consider the feasibility of promoting the development of these lots through a program of vacant lot identification. This program could map available vacant lots and document services available to them, thus showing the potential development cost of such lots.

Update Building Codes - To enhance the general public safety and encourage more economical and energy efficient housing construction, it is recommended that Sterling adopt an updated version of the Uniform Building Code. This code addresses recent technological advancements in housing construction and will encourage economical and energy efficient housing construction. The Uniform Building Code should be adopted as soon as possible.

Implementation of the above measures will encourage the development of an adequate housing supply for Sterling residents.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The major need identified by Goal 3 is for the preservation and expansion of local economic activity. As a vital part of Rice County's economic base system, Sterling's commercial and industrial activities have the benefit of a sound economic environment. Preservation of the central business district and development of a local economic development effort are the objectives of Goal 3 which will encourage expansion of the local economy. Discussed below are implementation measures for the Objectives of Goal 3.

Preservation of Central Business District - Identification of the central business district as the principal commercial area on the Future Land Use Plan is the best way in which to maintain a viable downtown area. Implementation of the Future Land Use Plan will encourage the development of new businesses in the downtown area, thus eliminating the potential for growth of shopping attractions away from downtown businesses.

Local Economic Development - A local effort is needed to develop a promotion program which identifies the benefits of new business development in the area. Preparation of a local community profile and working in conjunction with the Rice County Economic Development Commission will make it possible for Sterling citizens to promote the types of economic activity which will supplement the quality of life Sterling now enjoys. By developing a local promotion program it will be possible for Sterling to selectively promote the development of the types of economic activity which will not have an adverse effect on the community. This program will require joint cooperation of the public and private sectors and will be effective only if a local commitment is made to selective economic development.

#### PUBLIC FACILITIES

The Background Information report indicates that the general condition of public facilities serving Sterling is good. Currently underway are water and sewer facilities improvement programs funded jointly by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the State Department of Health and Environment, and the City. Completion of these projects will insure that adequate sewer and water facilities are available to serve the expected future population of Sterling. Goal 4 recognizes the good condition of these public facilities by identifying the need for maintenance and some improvement. Goal 4 objectives identify the

need for improvements to the communications systems for police and fire safety, street maintenance and improvements, and additional study of water tower needs as well as the floodplain areas. Implementation activities to attain these objectives are presented below.

Police and Fire Communications - Communications equipment at the Police Department needs some updating to provide improved protection of the public safety. A fixed base radio for the dispatcher is needed. A multi-frequency, 50 watt fixed base radio is recommended. A new mobile radio compatible with the fixed base radio should be obtained. While the mobile radio must be purchased through the Police Department budget, the fixed base radio may be eligible for purchase assistance through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. These radio improvements should be accomplished in the near future in order to provide for the continued effective provision of public safety services.

The present system of contacting the volunteer firemen by phone is over twenty years old. Development of a system in which a central dispatch number was used to report a fire would allow a dispatcher to determine manpower and equipment requirements. After determining the extent of the fire emergency the appropriate personnel could then be contacted with paging devices carried by the volunteers. This system would be more efficient and would reduce the cost, particularly in the case of smaller fire emergencies.

Streets - While a majority of Sterling's streets are paved and in good condition, there are two factors which should be addressed in the future. A street patching and repair program followed by a street sealing schedule should be undertaken to maintain the good condition of paved streets. Through annual budgeting funds should be set aside to reseal at least two paved streets per year. This would insure that paved streets are resealed at least every five or six years, thus reducing repair costs.

Paving of some of the unimproved streets is recommended in order to adequately serve existing development and to keep pace with new residential development. The streets listed below should be considered for paving as growth consistent with the Future Land Use Plan occurs. Implementation of the Future Land Use Plan will be enhanced by making the recommended improvements as they will support development proposed in various areas. The streets which should be considered for paving include:

Sixth Street North of Cleveland  
Third Street North of Ponderosa  
Jefferson West of First Street  
Jackson East of Third Street  
First Street South of Main and North of Jefferson  
Third, Fourth and Fifth Streets South of Jackson

Feasibility Studies - A 1978 water facility study indicated that construction of a water tower would require a doubling or tripling of water user rates. As the community grows and fire insurance rates are

reviewed it may become necessary that a water tower be reconsidered. In order to avoid inflationary impacts should such a need become critical, it is recommended that the feasibility of constructing a water tower continue to be actively pursued.. This study process should include an extensive public education program so that community residents are aware of all aspects of the issue. Construction of a water tower would have the benefits of providing an adequate emergency water supply as well as equalizing water pressure throughout Sterling.

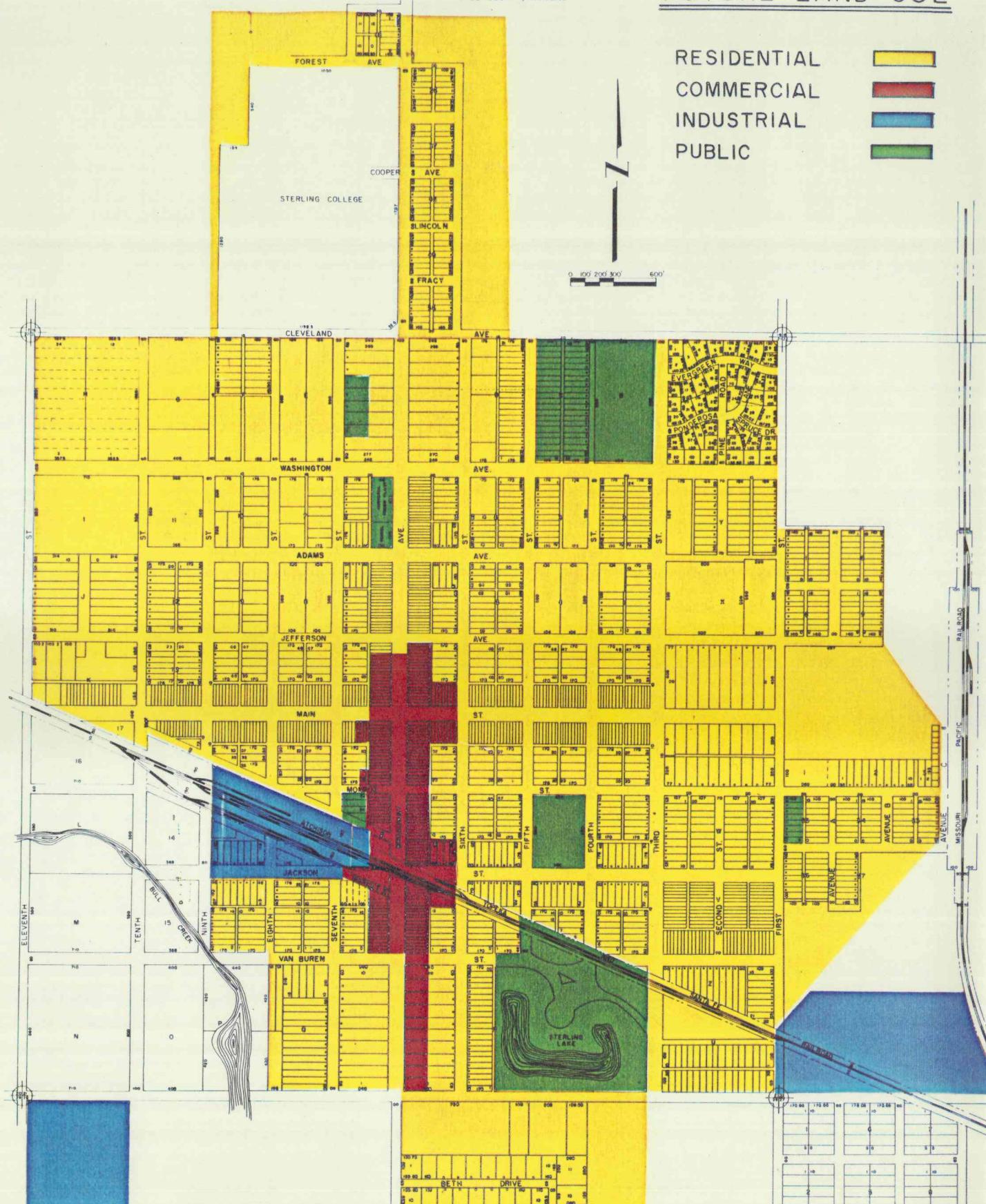
Flood hazard areas in Sterling have reduced the developability of southwest parts of town as a result of federal flood insurance requirements. A long range planning study of the feasibility of flood control to reduce or divert flood hazards may identify ways in which better land use of southwest Sterling **can** be attained. It is recommended this study be initiated within the next decade dependent upon growth needs of the community.

The above recommendations for feasibility studies identify two areas which exceed the scope of this Comprehensive Plan but which are important aspects of continuing adequate public services. Further study of these two issues is necessary in order to fully understand the costs and benefits of such improvements.

#### FUTURE LAND USE

Goal 5 sets forth the need for an orderly approach to the physical development of Sterling's land resources. Implicit in this goal statement is the adoption and implementation of the Future Land Use Plan, presented on the following page. The Future Land Use Plan presents a graphic illustration of the most orderly and economically feasible utilization of Sterling's land resources. The Future Land Use Plan is based upon the needs identified in the Background Information report as well as some of the needs expressed through the Goals and Objectives. For example, park areas are identified and land uses adjacent to streets which have been identified for improvement are recommended. The Future Land Use Plan is a physical description of the ends toward which the Comprehensive Plan is directed. The Future Land Use Map contains the following considerations:

1. Future residential growth is directed towards the south and northeast.
2. The Central Business District is identified as the commercial center, avoiding spot or strip commercial land uses.
3. Park areas are designated as a guide for future growth needs for recreation.
4. Industrial land uses are identified so that future industrial development will not conflict with residential growth.
5. Areas within flood hazard areas or which may be affected by flood hazards are designated for agricultural uses.



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When adopted, the Future Land Use Plan and this document will provide the legal basis by which the City can promote orderly growth and development. The Future Land Use Plan should be used as a guide by public and private interests to insure that future development does not create land use conflicts or disruption of the economical provision of goods and services.

In order to assist in attaining Goal 5, Objectives have identified the need for updating of zoning and subdivision regulations, adoption of extra-territorial zoning, and formulation of a continuing planning program. Implementation of the recommendations below will insure that Goal 5 Objectives provide for orderly growth of Sterling.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations - The present zoning ordinance should be revised to better address existing and future development needs and subdivision regulations should be adopted. As a supplement to the Comprehensive Plan proposed revisions to the zoning ordinance will be presented in June, 1980, as will proposed subdivision regulations. It is recommended that these regulations be implemented as soon as possible.

Extra-territorial Zoning - Development outside the corporate limits is often directly related to the urban activity of a community. At the same time, there is agricultural activity unrelated to urban growth. In order to promote compatibility among these various uses it is recommended that Sterling adopt extra-territorial zoning regulations to encourage orderly development adjacent to the City. A one mile extra-territorial zoning area is proposed to provide the City with control over the types and intensities of development which may affect the growth patterns of Sterling proper. Implementation of extra-territorial zoning will protect expansion areas on the periphery of Sterling and will also protect existing non-urban uses from future problems related to urban use expansion.

Continuing Planning Program - The process of developing the Comprehensive Plan has identified several issues which at the present are not considered critical to the future of Sterling. However, further study of these issues in the future as well as periodic review of the Plan is necessary to insure that changing conditions are properly addressed by the planning program. It is recommended that the Planning Commission develop a list of issues which should be evaluated in the future. Included on this list should be a review of the five Goals as well as such items as the water tower and floodplain studies, acquisition of additional land for Sterling Lake Park, and downtown beautification. As new issues arise they should be considered in an annual review of the Comprehensive Plan. By identifying issues requiring further study and by annually reviewing the Comprehensive Plan, a workable planning program can be developed to promote the orderly growth of Sterling.

## SUMMARY OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Detailed analysis of the socio-economic and physical characteristics of Sterling have shown that the future outlook for the community is positive. There are no major deficiencies in public facilities and the economic conditions in the Sterling area are stable. Consequently, there has been no need for detailed and expensive recommendations related to physical improvements or overly aggressive economic development activity. Because Sterling benefits from a steady population growth rate and a strong economic base, it has been possible to develop a Comprehensive Plan which is directed more towards the improvement of the quality of life than towards the resolution of difficult problems and deficiencies.

The Goals and Objectives are based upon the knowledge that a planned approach toward the future based upon the numerous positive aspects of the Sterling community will make Sterling a better place to live and grow. Plan recommendations have identified the steps necessary to perpetuate a good physical, social, and economic environment and utilization of the Comprehensive Plan and its recommendations will assist the citizens of Sterling as they work towards the future.