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Tiffin, Iowa: Corridor Beautification Plan

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TIFFIN, IOWA

CORRIDOR BEAUTIFICATION PLAN

JULY, 2001

Prepared for the City of Tiffin, Iowa

By: Jim Hardcastle, Mpeti Otola, Dustin Nilsen

Field Problems in Planning 102:210 Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning

Property of Urban and Regional Planning University of Iowa
Tiffin Corridor Beautification Plan

Prepared for the City of Tiffin, Iowa

Jim Hardcastle
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Dustin Nilsen

Field Problems in Planning
Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning
The University of Iowa
July, 2001

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Executive Summary

The following document was created to serve as a tool to help create a Corridor Beautification Plan for the City of Tiffin. The preparation of the Tiffin Corridor Beautification Plan was completed in order to encourage and improve the function of the three major community corridors while maintaining community character. Recommendations based on planning principles, policy, design, and practice, have been incorporated into the plan to help establish guidelines and provide insight into their objectives and reasoning.

The Plan comprises a number of sections, which include; Tiffin Inventory, Beautification Theory, Visioning Process, Transportation Analysis, Design Review, Appearance Codes, Funding Sources and Assistance Programs, and ultimately a set of site-specific recommendations and proposals.

Tiffin has the opportunity to control the influx of new development that is steadily encroaching on the community. By utilizing a community-wide vision and well-defined design and development standards, Tiffin will be able to promote the positive attributes that characterize their community and make it unique.

Recommendations included in the following document suggest a number of civic-led improvements aimed at creating a more pleasant environment. Within the
recommendation section, improvements to streetscape, sidewalk, and roadways are emphasized.

These recommendations are based upon design theory and community development practices commonly implemented by cities in directing development.

Specifically, both Highway 6 through Tiffin and Ireland Avenue should be redesigned to urban street standards. Urban standards consist of installing storm sewer, curbs, sidewalks, street lighting, landscaping and controlling driveway access to the highway. Installation of sidewalks will enhance corridor connectivity and improve the ability to handle pedestrian traffic. Lighting and streetscape will be very important in presenting the intended community image to people entering the city. Finally, controlling highway access with zoning requirements and other city ordinances will enhance vehicular safety and pedestrian safety. In addition, extending and realigning Ireland Avenue to Highway 6 will improve traffic flow through the city by providing a direct route to Interstate-80, thus keeping heavy traffic away from the front of the school and out of residential areas.
I. Introduction

Tiffin is a small town with an opportunity to capitalize on its proximity to the Iowa City/Coralville area. Tiffin is located in Johnson County northwest of the intersection of I-80 and I-380. Access to the community is along U.S. Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue, which act as community bisectors and thoroughfares and the area encompassed in this study includes the Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue entrances into the community. Ireland Avenue is the community’s connector to Interstate 80, ½ mile to the south. Highway 6 functions as the community’s primary commercial corridor and collector street. Both of these roads handle the the majority of the trips into and out of the city.

Improving the entrance to Tiffin’s commercial corridor can do this by merging it with metro area encroachment while maintaining its small-town charm. The town should take advantage of the recent local economic growth and population increases of the late 1990’s by enhancing the main Tiffin thoroughfare corridor. Much of this growth is the result of development in the neighboring communities of North Liberty, Coralville, and Iowa City. As the city makes changes that attract and accommodate commercial, manufacturing, retail, and other various industries, the community should prepare for this development by improving their corridors.

Goals for the project include developing a safe arterial roadway network, pedestrian friendly commercial areas, enhancing the community image with streetscape
improvements, and providing opportunities for future development along the corridor.

A corridor beautification plan for the town’s commercial center is based upon the general needs to develop unified, coherent, and aesthetically pleasing commercial public streets. The plan would also enhance a main commercial district along Highway 6 that would encourage pedestrian activity and safe vehicular circulation.

Such a goal is attainable with the use of an urban beautification program. Benefits of such a program can improve a city’s physical appearance, create assets that attract a multitude of uses to locate into the city while supporting and enhancing existing uses, and provide outdoor recreation and opportunities. In addition to these tangible benefits, a beautification plan can facilitate and strengthen the sense of community through improved roadways, individual sense of place, and identity.

A. Beautification

The relationship of an area’s built environment to its physical setting is critical in defining community character and promoting its positive attributes. The influence of smaller design elements such as streetlights, paving, landscape architecture, and variety of visual cues into the overall design of an area also help maintain a unique image of a place. For the creation of an aesthetically pleasing corridor, the form, appearance, and arrangement of the elements that make up the urban environment must be orchestrated to create a sense of overall organization, a pleasing visual image, a sense of vitality, and a
convenient setting for human activity (Project for Public Spaces, 1984). When designed to encourage pedestrian movement, provide for special activities, and to promote social interaction, a well-planned corridor can become a catalyst as well as the standard for new development and revitalization. Initiatives involving the definition of future goals for a community along with a community beautification effort can help create an urban space that is a successful place for people and a more attractive focus for investments, new development, and renovation.

Due to the fact that the physical environment is such a noticeable and pervasive expression of economic health, revitalization and improvements to an area’s overall environmental design can positively influence people’s perceptions and attitudes toward the area (Glassford, 1983). This perception can help to attract potential users make positive changes in the physical setting and can help open up opportunities for new investment.

The character of the Tiffin Corridor will depend on the quality of the design and the organization of individual elements and details, which together make up the total environment. Corridor roadways, their right of way, and the structures that front onto the corridor are the major elements from which the area draws its visual and aesthetic character. The style of design for Tiffin’s corridors should be developed in accordance to a community derived vision and guidelines described in subsequent sections.
B. Project Components

The group initially began with a local review and inventory of the Tiffin area and local ordinances in order to evaluate the area's needs. Next, a review of existing beautification plans from other communities was made and an assessment of how these plans have impacted their communities was done. With the review of existing and external information, the next step included a review of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) with regard to beautification within the community and how best to address them. The potential application of federal and state programs coupled with private initiatives will be addressed and included in the recommendations of the plan.

The group compiled the project objectives listed below after a review of similar programs.

Objectives:

a. To visually enhance corridors and to create an identifiable “gateway” into Tiffin.

b. To create a visual connection between Tiffin and I-380 on Highway 6, and from I-80 on Ireland Ave.

c. To create a low maintenance and visually aesthetic landscape for Tiffin.

d. To improve Tiffin’s pedestrian circulation from both the north and south residential areas to and throughout the Highway 6 commercial corridor.
II. Why Corridor Beautification is Important to Communities

The following section is a brief overview of some of the issues surrounding beautification. It includes findings and studies that support beautification efforts and their positive effects upon the community environment. It is important to note that beautification serves a greater purpose than making an area look nice; rather it can promote a sense of place that is conducive to community development in social and economic sectors. Therefore, it is important to not overlook some of the effects that civic amenities can provide to a community through the vehicle of beautification.

Beautification improves more than the appearance of space. It can be critical in establishing a community as a place and promoting a positive image that reflects the intrinsic qualities that make a community unique. If a community wishes to attract long-term residents and businesses, it must not overlook its appearance, physical character, and overall design. The importance of community image is supported by a number of national studies, including Tomas Power’s “The Economic Value of the Quality of Life,” which states that enhancing the economics and amenities of a community are integral to economic development (Brabec, 1992).

When considering the role of the Corridor, urban design theory emphasizes the use of the corridor as both a connector and isolator of neighborhoods and districts. In their discussion of town planning techniques, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk refer to the Corridor as “not the haphazardly residual ‘open space’ buffering the enclaves of
suburbia, but a proactive civic element characterized by its continuity” (Duany & Plater-Zyberk, 1990, pg 7). In these respects the corridor becomes an important element of not only community appearance but its organization as well.

In order to create an aesthetically pleasing corridor, the elements that make up the urban environment must be orchestrated to create a sense of overall organization. This can be achieved by coordinating the arrangement of urban design elements that establish a setting for residents to engage in various activities. The corridor can be designed to encourage community access, provide for special activities, and promote social interaction among both residents and visitors. By improving the overall organization of the corridor, communities can become a more beautiful place for people and an attraction for investments, new development, and renovation.

A. Community Image and Beautification

Community image can be described as the collection of qualities that connect people to their surroundings. In others words, the qualities become the visual cues that inform residents that they are in an environment in which they can feel comfortable or at ease. Features that readily display the image of a community may include the most prominent urban elements that characterize the built environment. These include local architecture and buildings, natural topography and vegetation, and design details such as landscaping, street lighting signage and paving.
Streetscape and aesthetic improvements can renew interest in an area and shape future development. Investments which improve area infrastructure as well as public and civic space can help enhance community image and promote its potential as a market and a place to live.

Money spent on improving the urban environment of a community can do more than improve community image. By investing in municipal improvements a community can effectively demonstrate its commitment to developing an area, its ability to confront and manage problems, and its supportive attitude toward development, all of which have a direct impact on leveraging private investment by closing the gap between development costs and profitability (ULI, 1988).

The Urban Land Institute identifies seven general principles that serve as the basis for the creation of a quality environment and for evaluating each community’s evolving form and character. These principles encourage communities to, create an organized structure, foster distinctive identity, encourage variety and interests, ensure visual and functional continuity, maximize convenience, provide for comfort, and emphasize quality (ULI, 1988).

a. Create an Organized Structure

A clear development pattern and plan will provide a unifying framework that will help residents and visitors understand area organization. This should be the central
component to help build an identity for a community. A community that is easily navigable will promote a feeling of emotional security, well-being, and comfort. By maintaining an organized corridor, users will more easily be able to determine the special layout of Tiffin and therefore be encouraged to frequent it as visitors more often.

b. Foster Distinctive Identity

A vivid image can help distinguish an area as a special place with a unique character. Fostered through the orchestration of design elements and layers, the well-designed space can display a particular character that sets it apart from other areas. By further distinguishing Tiffin from neighboring communities, residents and visitors alike will share in a common yet unique experience.

c. Encourage Variety and Interests

Catering to a variety of interests and incorporating inclusive policies will promote the interaction of residents within public spaces. Acknowledging a myriad of public interests and encouraging the general public to use a place will add to its image and flavor.

d. Ensure Visual and Functional Continuity

As previously mentioned, the use of continuity among urban design elements aid in the organization of space in a particular area. A well-defined streetscape can be influential in the creation of distinct area identity. Repetition in the use of street furnishings and other design elements can reinforce the organized structure of an area. Few will argue that one
of the most cost effective design methods that can be incorporated to unify an area is the use of trees and a comprehensive landscaping scheme along all streets. A number of cities have enacted distinct guidelines, which require the use of trees and landscaping in order to improve the community’s character and enhance economic vitality along streets (Brabec and Kirby, 1993).

e. Maximize Convenience

The focus on parking, pedestrian movement, and the coordination of multi-modal transportation can increase mobility and community-wide accessibility. A well thought out pedestrian environment will also create a positive setting for leisure activities and can encourage the development of desirable community uses. By giving priority to design options that encourage pedestrians to travel through the corridor on foot, it is possible to capitalize on an existing workforce and residential population to create an environment where retail, recreational, and entertainment uses can prosper (ULI, 1988). The arrangement and coordination of multiple transportation modes should emphasize convenience for all users throughout the community to avoid land use conflicts.

f. Provide for Comfort

Design of the corridor environment must consider the physical and psychological comfort for users. Adequate walkway widths, shade, seating, and a sense of protection from vehicular traffic are essential in creating a comfortable space for users. The use of street lighting and unobstructed visibility can also aid in the creation of public spaces that are
welcoming to a variety of users.

g. **Emphasize Quality**

As discussed above, the fundamental elements of a quality public environment cannot be overlooked. The Urban Land Institute makes the following argument regarding quality public improvements.

"Quality is at least as important as quantity in determining whether public improvements and private investment will contribute to a self-sustaining ...economy. In the final analysis, it is how well the development is executed and the quality of urban design that determine the real value of public and private investment. If the dollars spent on development fail to enhance the image of the City's structure, visual environment, sense of identity, and quality as a setting for activity, the investment will not achieve its full potential in building a lasting foundation for revitalization" (ULI, 1988, 52).

**B. Economic Considerations for Beautification**

More and more communities are discovering that if the physical environment is welcoming to people, it can serve as a catalyst for creating an opportunity to bring economic growth and vitality to the local economy. Many small town commercial centers tend to be severely affected by the development of larger commercial centers. In order for small commercial districts to remain competitive, they must provide a more attractive and interesting experience. Because the physical environment is such a visible expression of economic health, physical improvements can dramatically influence perceptions toward an area and help attract new investments (ULI, 1988).

In addition to new investments, protecting and improving property values can help
improve the economic well being of a community. Since one of a municipality’s prime funding sources is real-estate property tax, public improvements that increase private property values will in turn be recovered as municipal revenue and as equity for property owners.

C. Coordinating Beautification

The decisions that shape a city’s physical character should be carefully coordinated with various interested parties to insure coherence, promote vitality and interest among an inclusive group, enhance comfort and convenience for multiple users, and create an identifiable image for the community. Mainstreet revitalization models have shown that successful programs are characterized by a commitment to public-private partnerships, local source funding, local business involvement, a range of business assistance and incentives, well developed promotion efforts, and a comprehensive set of design tools including code enforcement, and design review boards and assistance (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1988).

“Since a community’s character as a place that protects the public interest it is an appropriate activity for the public sector. However progress can be achieved more easily if both the community at large and private sector decision makers clearly understand urban design objectives, see the benefit of the objectives in maximizing long term value and profitability of investment, and apply the objectives in internal decision making process. Both the public and private sectors need a vision of what the community physical environment can be, based on a clear understanding of existing assets, hard work in defining objectives and reaching consensus on them, and learning about what others have done to achieve similar objectives. In addition, all public and private activities must be guided by commitment, persistence, and patience” (ULI, 1988, 47).
D. Conclusion

Beautification can be more than the improvement of community aesthetics. Improving
the physical design and streetscape organization of an area can promote a sense of place
that is conducive to community development in social and economic sectors. Regardless
of municipality size, civic amenities can create a more livable space for community
members and are essential in attracting long-term residents and businesses. In
communities such as Tiffin beautification is critical in establishing a sense of place and
promoting a positive image that reflects the intrinsic qualities that make a community
unique.
III. Process for Street Beautification - Visioning

A. Introduction

The proposed manner of program creation and implementation for the Tiffin Corridor Beautification Plan is the process of working with the entire community including homeowners, organizations, businesses, and government agencies in what is commonly referred to as “visioning”. The base process of visioning (English, 1999) will be used broadly to refer to the overall process of identifying and planning infrastructure changes in Tiffin. This will be done by identifying values, statements of concern, decision-making, and monitoring change of the beautification over time. The visioning process will not create a perfect construct that solves current problems that a city experiences. It is a process of evaluating present conditions, identifying problem areas, and bringing about a city-wide consensus for programs to address current problems and implement a system to manage future developments.

B. Values

The first step of the visioning process is the identification of values by engaging the public in a discussion that elicits responses from concerned citizens as suggested by English (1999). These include the concepts and expectations of what is desirable for change within Tiffin. These issues and values are not static, though some are deep-rooted in the town’s history while others can be shaped and amended as citizens are educated about a community problem and its potential solutions. The identification of values will
lead to vision statements.

C. Vision Statements

The actual Vision Statement has become an essential part of the planning process for program changes within community planning. A vision is an investigation of the possible scenarios that are acceptable to the residents. The initial step in creating a vision statement is to generate exercises that allow brainstorming within smaller groups. Themes that emerge from these groups will form the basis for the statements. This will provide residents with the opportunity to articulate their ideas about the future of Tiffin in their own words.

D. Forums

The Values and Vision Statements are completed in a venue that will bring community groups together and is essential to the vision statement. These methods of group interaction include large gatherings such as town meetings, small groups, committees, task forces, and focus groups where people with varied backgrounds and experiences can interact and share their ideas. The key is to encourage discussion focused on the future of Tiffin.

E. Making Decisions

To implement the vision and create action plans, it is important to involve businesses, local organizations, and individuals, as well as the Tiffin city government. It is important
to bring these key potential decision makers into the visioning and planning process in the preliminary stages, not just when decisions are to be selected and implemented. An accountability matrix is a typical product of this step that identifies goals, objectives, agencies or organizations responsible for program components, costs associated with the plan, possible avenues for funding, and an anticipated timeline. This makes yearly follow-up easier and assures success in a timelier manner.

F. Monitoring Change

Additionally, there should be an ongoing plan for review and periodical updates to ascertain whether the plan is meeting the expectations of the citizens. This idea of monitoring is simple. A central program planner in the City of Tiffin government reviews the plan yearly and when not meeting the intent of the original plan, or if conditions in the community have changed, the plan should be modified through a process similar to the initial program creation.

The difficult aspect in updating of a program is actually in tracking the positive and negative elements that are championed by other agencies. The program planner should then coordinate with all of the responsible agencies and organizations to assure program goals and objectives are being met.
G. Conclusion

To implement a successful project Tiffin must establish a community-supported vision, plan, and municipal regulations to serve as a road map to guide the process of beautification. These fundamental elements of the beautification process will be the foundation that all other components will be built upon. They will not only aid in the development of design layouts and priorities but also will give legitimacy to the ordinances and requirements set out by civic leaders to be adhered to by private developers. Without these foundations, coordinating beautification among various stakeholders and interested parties will be extremely difficult if not impossible.

With the above in mind we must not forget that implementation will occur in various stages. First a community vision used to create community supported regulations must be developed. This process of visioning is set out in Section III of the main document. It is here members of the general community, developers, and civic leaders and decision-makers will set the standards for future development.
IV. Evaluation of Existing Conditions

A. Introduction

Tiffin is a small town located in Northwest Johnson County, Iowa. In the last decade the city has sustained and continues to experience explosive population growth (See Figure 1). Consequently, this population growth has caused a housing and economic boom. However, local infrastructure has not yet been overburdened but changes are necessary in order to continue to meet the needs of the community. In this section the location of the city, current growth concerns (population and school aged population), and housing and economy, as well as transportation issues are analyzed and described.

a. Location

Located in northwest Johnson County, Iowa, the City of Tiffin encompasses an area that

![Figure 1: Tiffin and Surrounding Communities]
is approximately 3.27 square miles. Situated at the intersection of Interstate 80 and Interstate 380, Tiffin neighbors the communities of North Liberty, Coralville, and Iowa City (see Figure 2). Access to the community is primarily handled by U.S. Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue, which act as community bisectors and thoroughfares. Ireland Avenue is the community’s connector to Interstate 80, ½ mile to the south. Highway 6 functions as the community’s primary commercial corridor and collector street.

![Figure 2: City of Tiffin, Street Layout](image)

b. Growth Issues

The City of Tiffin has seen a sudden increase in population size since 1990. The 2000
US Census shows the population is currently at 975, in 1990 the population for the city was 460. With a growth rate of 112 percent in the last decade, Tiffin’s population is growing at a very rapid pace (see Figure 3).

![Population Graph](image)

**Figure 3** – Tiffin Population Graph

c. **School Enrollment**

Enrollment figures for 2000-2001 show 350 students attending the elementary, middle and high school, coming from Tiffin and surrounding areas such as North Liberty, Oxford and the Amana Colonies. The Clear Creek Amana School District has an elementary school in Oxford, but a new elementary school building in Tiffin has been discussed. As school enrollment numbers have increased each year, we anticipate new facilities will be needed.
d. Housing and Economy

The median household income grew from $14,500 in 1980 to $26,719 in 1990, when adjusted for inflation. In this same time period total housing units increased from 178 to 206, total occupied units grew from 165 to 190, and owner occupied and renter occupied units increased from 105 to 116 and 60 to 74 respectively (Iowa State University, 2001).

Based on discussions during city council meetings, the consensus is that the citizens of Tiffin have reservations about the insurgent multi-family, mobile housing and commercial development in the City. The citizens of Tiffin prefer development of single family housing instead.

The City of Tiffin has very few businesses, currently (year 2001) there are 17 establishments doing business within Tiffin’s city limits with the school district as the largest employer; in 1976 the city was a host to 7 businesses. Other businesses include a bank, a general store, a gas station, a dry cleaner, a church, an ice cream store, a post office, and various other commercial services. In 2000 retail sales in Tiffin totaled over $2.37 million. Sales per business in Tiffin fell 22.09% in 2000, but statewide sales per business rose 4.07%. This means businesses in Tiffin are not making as many sales as businesses operating in other locales in the state (Iowa State University, 2001).

Regionally Tiffin is situated in an area of economic vitality. Neighboring communities of Coralville and Iowa City have an abundance of employment and commercial
opportunities, which have spilled over into Tiffin. This spillover effect has been
demonstrated by the influx of new residents within Tiffin.

According to the Johnson County tax apportionment formula, approximately $100,000
was apportioned to Tiffin-Clear Creek and $193,000 for the Tiffin Urban Renewal area
(this money went to the city) as part of the total apportionment of approximately
$313,000. When additional credits are incorporated the total awarded to Tiffin was
approximately $324,000 for the fiscal year 2000. It is evident that the city of Tiffin has a
very small tax base. But this tax base can be expanded if changes that attract investment
are made.

e. Transportation and Roadway Concerns

With the growth that Tiffin has experienced in the past decade there have been numerous
concerns for traffic and safety, according to a 1997 letter from Tiffin’s Mayor Glenn
Potter, which identifies traffic safety as Tiffin’s “the number one priority”. The concerns
stem from “current speed limits, lack of signalization and limited alternative routes
through Tiffin have created very unsafe conditions on the cities streets.” There are six
distinct pressing issues that the City of Tiffin has encountered on the Highway-6 corridor
through Tiffin and Ireland Avenue, entrance from Interstate-80.

The continued development of the Coral Ridge Mall area has and will continue to
increase traffic on Highway 6 through Tiffin. According to October 1998 Iowa
Department of Transportation Traffic counts, the Annual Average Daily Traffic through Tiffin on Highway 6 is 3,530 vehicles on the west city limits, 4,020 at Grant Street and 4,090 vehicles in the east Tiffin city limits. This is a significant threat to the residents of Tiffin, because it is their main entrance into the city.

With the population increase in Tiffin, the city will undoubtedly experience increased traffic volume on all major city roads. All North-South streets in Tiffin connect to Highway-6. These streets will be utilized to access the highway. According to Johnson County Council of Governments the current traffic volume level is well within the traffic capacity of the road (JCCOG '98). With I-80 serving as the main east-west conduit for traffic in this area, it is conceivable that current volume on the road could double before consideration is given to adding lanes to Highway 6.

The majority of the new residential development is occurring north of Highway 6, the High School is located south of Highway 6. All elementary and junior high students must walk to the High School in order to get on the buses for Oxford or Amana. The absence of continuous sidewalks along Highway 6 is the most significant deficiency for the safety of pedestrian and school children.

However the current pattern of development will require redesigning Highway 6 through Tiffin, in order to accommodate higher levels and different types of usage. A pattern of development has evolved in Tiffin with the newer commercial development on the east
end of town; the older homes are in the center and the school on the west end. In addition there are newly developing residential areas on both the northwest and southeast sides town that are not well connected for pedestrian travel. The new post office, new bank, a new gas station and new retail shops are all located north of the highway. The majority of Tiffin’s population resides on the South side of Highway 6. This indicates that there will be a need to better facilitate traffic flow interaction between these sections of town in order to accommodate all users of the corridor. These accommodations can be implemented when the highway is redesigned.

As of August 1998 the City of Tiffin will have invested over $140,000 in a new pedestrian trail system. This trail system, partially funded with Federal ISTEA grants, includes two crossings of Highway 6. There are no stop signs or stoplights at these crossings, only yellow warning signs. However they come to a stop and are not connected to other areas of the cities transportation system. The city can make better use of these types of investments by ensuring that they connect to the entire infrastructure network therefore ensuring their usage by citizens.

Narrow city streets serve as main connectors between Highway-6 and Interstate-80. According to the most recent Johnson County Council of Government traffic counts on Ireland Avenue and Grant Street there are 2,618 and 2,370 vehicles per day respectively (1998). On residential streets such as Grant Street a volume of about 200 to 400 cars per day is expected. Although the volume of vehicles on Grant and Ireland are fairly low for
a link to the interstate highway system, they are five to eight times the expected volume. This volume of vehicle shows that there is some significant amount of non-local traffic using city streets as access between Highway 6 and I-80.

f. Conclusion

In conclusion Tiffin’s location near Iowa/Coralville and at the intersection of I-80 and I-380 seems to make growth inevitable, especially with the westward pattern of development occurring in the metro area. Consequently, the growth in population, housing starts, and income will continue to spill over to Tiffin. However this growth presents numerous problems to the city and residents of Tiffin, as evidence of traffic growth on residential streets being five to eight times greater than the designed capacity of these streets. Finally, Tiffin must provide alternative means of accessing services, achieved by having coherent, connected and aesthetically pleasing transportation infrastructure.

B. Plan Evaluation

An evaluation of the current Land Use Plan, Zoning, Subdivision, and Design Standards Ordinances was performed in order to identify needs and potential areas for modification. Additionally, the review of existing ordinances was done to ascertain how these plans have impacted the community. After the review of existing and external information, the next step was to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of each ordinance with regard to beautification within the community and how best to
address the needed changes.

C. Land Use Plan

The current Land Use Plan was approved in 1992 and is concerned primarily with an inventory of the community previously unperformed prior to this date. The plan states that the Highway 6 corridor should continue developed as the primary commercial focal point of the community. There are commercial uses that exist along Highway 6 that are in conflict with the heavy numbers of residential subdivisions as seen in Figure 4 below.

![Figure 4. Commercial and residential uses along Highway 6](image)

Although the need to develop the corridor is supported in the ordinance, there are many incompatible uses throughout the area because they have been developed without direction from the plan. The plan must be adjusted to give greater latitude to infill in
many areas with uses that would not directly conflict with the existing uses. The threat to this plan is that although it is generally a solid plan, it could be continue to be applied inconsistently and in a fashion that does not strengthen the potential continuity of the corridor areas.

D. Zoning

A planning and zoning commission was created in 1963 and a zoning ordinance was enacted in 1979. Seven zone districts were created in an effort to review and help design the best site layout possible though with little regard to the constraints of conflicting and nuisance uses uses. Today there are now eleven districts.

The zoning ordinance initially set out to create specific use districts that allow for so as to separate land use with little conflict between the uses. To that end, additions that address landscaping and buffer recommendations can be included in a rezoning request proposal create areas that have the look of the natural environment.

Initially the ordinance was successful, but it quickly became apparent to the existing landowners and city administration that there was much ambiguity and most districts were incomplete in allowable uses. It also did not require consistent development of the
commercial corridor along Highway 6 as demonstrated by the close proximity of residential dwellings and commercial units on the left in Figure 5 above. The early ordinance led to multiple interpretations of the separate districts. The development community and the city saw little development opportunities throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s, at the time the Iowa City-Coralville area had not sufficiently developed to place growth pressures on the town yet.

The ordinance sections created in the current Zoning ordinance of 1998 have been reviewed for their impact on the prospective implementation of a corridor beautification plan. These designations were chosen as they have the most current impact on potential development along the corridor. These sections have various items that have an impact
on the beautification program and are discussed below.

The Central Business District Commercial, and the Peripheral Business District Commercial, have been constructed with 15 and 17 main permitted uses of high customer visitation that breakdown into many compatible uses for a main corridor that serves high volumes of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. This allows for hierarchically spaced uses to be in a place that supports the daily commercial function of the business district. Modifications such as right of way widening and the implementation of various beautification elements such as benches, planters and decorative lights, could be implemented onto existing lots such as that shown in Figure 6. Additionally, Second
story apartments, 5-foot building setback lines, and no minimum lot sizes support the commercial intent of this district and allow many beautification design elements to be put in place. The allowed uses would also require on-site parking. The requirement exists for up to 20-foot setback distances for most uses. The uses in this district provide for the compatible application of other beautification proposals.

The Highway Commercial District, or C-2, is primarily for the use of those visiting by auto for 18 primary uses that allow more concise and concentrated shopping centers located off of the primary Highway 6 corridor. Figure 7 shows how this district does not prevent corridor beautification improvements, as there are many vacant lots currently along Highway 6 that can allow for deeper setbacks and other buffer improvements. By
placing more highly intensive uses into the community and well off main arterials, thus supporting the small town feel and charm as implied in the corridor plan.

The Light Industrial and Heavy Industrial districts, use areas are set up to allow heavier uses along the Highway 6 corridor on the edge of town with a required 20-foot setback. This allows for a pedestrian friendly strip to be applied as suggested in this beautification plan as in Figure 8 below. The district also has allowances for uses serving the broader community including the town core, urban fringe, and outlaying agricultural area. This district currently has appropriate physical requirements that generally support the reconstruction Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue. However, at this time, there are a variety

Figure 8. An area along Highway 6 that would be well suited for heavier impact uses
of uses that are technically allowed that may be potentially obtrusive to visitors and residents from Highway 6 such as manufacturing operations, repair shops, dairy facilities, and freight terminals.

Sign regulations do not mandate any kind of conformity to use other than size restrictions in many of the districts that range in area from 25-100 square feet per side in area. This use allows the placement of most signs to be posted on front setbacks except in the C-1 where they are to be placed on buildings within 20-feet of residential uses in C-1B district. As seen from the number of municipal signs in Figure 9, this could lead to a number of confusing situations for motorists. The intent of this section should provide for the most restrictive allowance possible so that the historic character of the corridor

Figure 9. Informational and safety sign placement along Ireland Avenue
strip is not compromised.

Non-Conforming Uses, primarily in regard to structures, allow no increase in the size of non-conforming structures. Although this does not limit beautification, there is general recommendation language in this section that allows for slowly bringing violating uses into compliance.

E. Subdivision

The local subdivision ordinance was created in 1979, and was updated in 1998. This update includes improvements that impact the infrastructure requirements and mandatory

![Figure 10. Area for complete and connective sidewalks to improve safety and encourage daily use](image-url)
dedication of recreational and public use areas for each development to prevent unusable, unsafe, and impassable areas, as shown in Figure 10 above. The updated ordinance actually created the administrative capacity for platting, requiring fees, building permit denial, construction of improvements, required improvements, street standards, and other items that have an impact on the creation of the corridor area. As the corridor develops the requirements in place in this ordinance will have an impact on the business district by the allocation of needed easements, improvement requirements, and right-of-way dedications (see Figure 11). It will also play a role in the layout of the adjacent uses such as residential, which must be protected with a buffer from impacting corridor uses. This ordinance also has an impact on the visual appearance of the collector streets by maintaining that gutters and ditches are engineered into aesthetically pleasing grassed catch basins and drainage ways.

F. Conclusion

The evaluation of the current Land Use Plan and Zoning, Subdivision, and Design Standards Ordinances identified many ways that existing and potential development could be designed to mesh with the principles found within the recommendations of the three corridors in this plan. The review of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of each ordinance identified several areas that can be enhanced so as to build on the existing beauty, natural landscape, and visual appearances of Tiffin.
V. Corridor Improvement Recommendations

A. Introduction

The following section is comprised of site-specific recommendations relating to corridor beautification for the City of Tiffin (see Table 1). The recommendations have been broken down into three areas of emphasis: Highway 6 East, Ireland Avenue, and Highway 6 West, as shown in Figure 11. Within the community, each of these areas plays specific roles as corridors.

Figure 11: Tiffin City Layout and Proposed Corridors
By separating them in so far as recommendations are concerned, the group was able to focus on the beautification effort and the needs relevant to these particular areas. The issues addressed in this section include; roadway design, sidewalks for pedestrian traffic, streetscape design, and land use. These recommendations discuss general physical aesthetics, roadway modifications, visual continuity, pedestrian access and connectivity.

Our recommendations and improvements involve Highway 6 East, also known as Marengo Road. As a major thoroughfare through Tiffin and neighboring communities, improvements along this corridor should receive top priority not only because of the local use but also because of the growing use as a corridor to the Amanas from the Iowa City-Coralville area. Following the Highway 6 East recommendations are similarly constructed sections for Ireland Avenue and Highway 6 West, which discuss site-specific improvements to be considered along each corridor.

The subsequent series of recommendations is organized by area as a prioritized list based on our observations of existing conditions. Staying with sound planning practice, it should be noted that community is supported and encouraged to amend the area recommendations and priorities to suit community visions and goals.
B. General Corridor Recommendations

Roadway design and construction can be the most important activity undertaken by Tiffin in improving its image. Normally when we think of road beautification we think of landscaping, especially tree planting. In reality, beautification can incorporate various elements of the road itself, such as the physical and connectivity of the road; additionally it can incorporate other elements such as viaduct, bridge design or roadside utilitarian services, such as signs, fountains and benches. Depending on the relationship with adjacent land-uses, streets need to take into consideration the different needs of the bicyclists, pedestrians and motor vehicles.

In general, roadways such as Highway 6 through Tiffin and Ireland Avenue access to Interstate 80, tend to be a community’s most important and most used public spaces. Not only do streets provide travel routes and function as conduits for commerce, communication, recreation and residential settlement, but these public roadways can provide something more important for community well being: a venue for public interaction. In order to provide this venue the roadway design and connectivity is very important in facilitating these public and community interactions. It is essential that a roadway, especially one that bisects a small community such as Tiffin be incorporated into the community and not isolated from the community.
a. Roadway Design

Redesigning Highway 6 can be appropriately considered in terms of beautification if it is redesigned from a rural highway to urban standard. Ireland Avenue should also be built up from a rural road to a fully integrated urban street standard. This type of reconstruction entails building an urban cross section roadway that includes storm sewers, curbs, sidewalks, street landscaping, lighting and the control of highway access from driveways. According to Iowa Department of Transportation and Johnson County Council of Governments, there is currently no need to expand the road beyond two lanes. Keeping the road in its current form will greatly enhance the ability of pedestrians to cross the street since two-lane roads with curb and gutter (urban street) is narrower than rural road standard. Elements along the highway such as street lighting, trees, better control of driveway access, and possibly on-street parking will indicate to motorists that they have left a rural area and are now in the city; this will provide cues to motorists to slow down as they drive through Tiffin.

The Redesign of Highway 6 through Tiffin from a rural highway and the reconstruction of Ireland Avenue to a city street with curb and gutter, curb cutouts and sidewalks is essential. This will provide a significant number of benefits, in addition to aesthetic benefits to your community. The construction of complete sidewalks and landscaping along Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue are of paramount importance, as these thoroughfares are gateways to Tiffin and therefore will provide a first impression of the
community. In addition, Tiffin should continue to require sidewalks on new streets and if feasible retrofit sidewalks on older streets.

b. Sidewalks for Pedestrian Traffic

As previously noted, pedestrian access in Tiffin will be greatly enhanced by redesigning Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue corridors. This will be achieved by retrofitting both roadways from rural road to urban street standards. However, maximum access and connectivity for pedestrians will require the sidewalks to be connected to the existing trail system (See Figure 12).

Figure 12: Sidewalk and Trails Concept Plan – City of Tiffin, Iowa
It is possible to install additional pedestrian controls, however the installation of unwanted controls on Highway 6 is not necessary at this time. Eventually, when Tiffin believes new crossing controls are warranted the city should contact Johnson County Council of Governments and request a gap study, which will determine the gaps in traffic and where to properly place a new crossing signal (JCCOG, 1998). By improving streetscape and roadway design, Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue will be better suited to accommodate pedestrian traffic.

c. Streetscape Design

Streetscape continuity can be achieved over time by adopting coordinated design guidelines for a city’s regular capital program for street improvements. However, a short-term improvement may be desirable in selected areas to reinforce or promote private investments in renovation and new development. This should include a demonstration pilot area to be used as a springboard to help implement and guide future plans and leverage additional resources for community development projects.

Signs also play an influential role in determining the degree of visual continuity of an area. They can be improved within in a relatively short period to yield visible results. Guidelines are needed to promote consistency in the size, design, and placement of business signs. A coordinated program for the use and design of public directional and informational signs is also needed to organize their presentation and to reduce visual
clutter. Clearly a consistent program of restrictive sign usage is appropriate within the full extent of the corridor area. This would not detract from the intent of the ordinance, which is to allow the public to more easily find their destination. However with a restructured and rebuilt corridor strip and a lowered speed limit, the placement of signs would change the character of the district to be more fitting with the ideals of this plan.

d. Zoning

The zoning ordinance also has elements that could be modified to support beautification along all areas covered by the plan. The heavy use in the M-2 district along Highway 6 certainly does not allow for the beautification of the downtown district because of the setback and intensity of the allowed uses. Therefore, it might be more beneficial to the elements of the beautification plan to create industrial uses isolated away from highway visibility and environmentally sensitive areas. Additionally the Commercial areas hold elements such as building setback lines, minimum lot size, and use types that allow businesses along Highway 6 and Ireland Avenue that support streetscape design, right-of-way improvements, and sidewalk design.

For properties that are technically non-conforming uses under their respective designation, zoning but provide a vital community service, the city could implement a program to bring them into compliance. The city could look for grant support that would allow residents to make renovations on their property that would help bring it into
conformance. Ultimately, this would allow the new conforming uses to expand properly and continue a use that is supportive of the community.

However, there is one barrier to implementing a beautification plan. There are currently a number of incompatible land uses, residential properties, found along the Highway 6 corridor that do not conform to the intent of commercial uses on the land use plan map. The city should engage in a special section of planning to best decide how these uses can be assimilated into the plans for beautification, or there must be a plan helping them find other residential locations while converting all of the Highway 6 corridor into a manageable mixed use commercial district.

The city at this time has a number concise and fairly thorough written development ordinances that will help to create a more beautiful corridor when implemented properly. They apply to a wide variety of uses and general conflict nuisance avoidance as many ordinances are designed to do. The subdivision and design standards ordinances in particular will be helpful in attaining the goals of corridor beautification when coupled with the other recommendations in the later half of this document. Only minor changes in many of these ordinances and a more concise management of them on a daily basis will serve as building blocks for the corridor beautification plan. In addition to and in support of these changes, there may be a need to assign a fulltime planner position to administer the ordinances.
e. Conclusion

In conclusion, roadway design and construction can be the most important activity undertaken by Tiffin in improving its image. In order to improve its image both Highway 6 through Tiffin and Ireland Avenue should be redesigned to urban street standards. Urban standards entail installing storm sewers, curb cutout, sidewalks, street lighting, landscaping and controlling driveway access to the highway. Installation of sidewalks will enhance corridors connectivity and improve the ability to handle pedestrian traffic. Lighting and streetscape will be very important in presenting the intended community image to people entering the city. In addition controlling highway access and signs with zoning requirements will enhance visual connectivity and improve vehicular and pedestrian safety. Finally, extending and realigning Ireland Avenue to Highway 6 will improve traffic flow through the city by providing a more direct route to Interstate-80, thus keeping heavy traffic away from the front of the school and out of residential areas.
### Table 1. General Corridor Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose:</th>
<th>General Corridor Recommendations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To improve the aesthetics and functionality of Tiffin’s community corridors</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sidewalks:</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set of cross walks, and sidewalk breaks with textured and decorative paving to route non-vehicular users to designated crossing areas</td>
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<td>Widen, grade, and align existing sidewalks to accommodate for bicycles and special needs accessibility</td>
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<tr>
<th>Streetscape:</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use decorative lighting to illuminate pedestrian routes throughout the community</td>
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<td>Improve area aesthetics and user safety with trail an path lighting</td>
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<tr>
<th>Landscaping:</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Incorporate street trees to unify the overall motif of the area and to emphasize the natural environmental aesthetics.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Include the use of shade trees for pedestrian comfort and protection from the elements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use evergreen bushes to act as insulator for non vehicular uses, create pedestrian routes, and provide protection from road debris and noise</td>
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<tr>
<th>Design Comments:</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decorative Paving</td>
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<td>Decorative and Illuminating streets lights</td>
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<tr>
<th>Signage:</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Install community welcome signs to replace the existing Iowa Department Of Transportation Sign.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use municipal signs to help orientate users</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Propose an ordinance requiring private development to adhere to design standards and incorporate business signs and displays to local architectural flavor and style.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Highway 6 East Recommendations and Improvements

a. Purpose

As the primary connector to neighboring communities of Coralville and Iowa City, the first priority to beautification improvements should revolve around Highway 6, due to its volume of traffic and its role as a community connector and regional transportation route. As seen in Figure 13 existing streetscape improvements are limited along Highway 6. A synopsis of area recommendations can be reviewed in Table 2.

![Figure 13: Existing View of Highway 6 City limits facing West.](image)

b. Sidewalks

At this time a sidewalk runs on the north side of Highway 6 along with the first phase of a comprehensive trail system. These existing improvements should be used to set the
stage for future urban design. It is therefore recommended that the City of Tiffin incorporate the Johnson County regional trail system proposed throughout neighboring communities into future trail expansion. Additional improvements for sidewalk and trail expansion on the south side of Highway 6 should incorporate the proposed park as part of the overall beautification effort similar to that found on the north (Figure 14). Special attention should be paid to widen, grade, and align existing sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists and those with special needs. At this time current conditions make accessibility to the trail and sidewalk system difficult due to their disjointed surfaces. Ramped walkways at crosswalks and access points will reduce the difficulties often associated with pedestrian and non-vehicular transportation systems.

Figure 14: Existing trail improvements on the north side of Highway 6 and Main Street Intersection, natural area lends itself to become a pocket park
c. Streetscape

To maximize user safety, conflicting uses should be separated. This can be accomplished with the use of curb and gutter as well as landscaping improvements. Additional improvements that will maximize user safety and convenience as well as area aesthetics include trail and path lighting, which allow both pedestrian and vehicular traffic to easily identify other corridor users. The City should also encourage pedestrian and bicycle passage at designated cross walks, set off by textured or decorative paving (Figure 15). This designation promotes a safer highway crossing by controlling pedestrian travel routes and improving pedestrian visibility to vehicular traffic. Offset walkways also help users orient themselves while navigating the community and provide a sense of direction.

Figure 15: Offset paving and street lighting establish a crossing route across Highway 6. The incorporation of street furniture and landscaping can also enhance user experience
d. Landscaping

The use of landscaping to create a welcoming environment and to help emphasize the significance of place can be a cost effective beautification solution. It is therefore recommended to incorporate street trees to unify the overall motif of the area and to emphasize the natural environmental aesthetics (Figure 16).

![Image of landscaped area]

Figure 16: Alternative view for Highway 6: The use of decorative paving and street trees help create unifying themes and visually link the corridor while providing shade and protection to pedestrians.

The City should also include the use of shade trees for pedestrian comfort and protection from the elements. Evergreen bushes can act as insulation from vehicular uses, create pedestrian routes, and provide protection from road debris and noise. Together these elements can, not only improve the appearance of an area, but can improve the
experience of users by providing a comforting environment free of conflicting uses.

e. Design Comments

An additional feature that could be incorporated into the Highway 6 East Corridor includes the creation of a pocket park on the north side at the intersection of Highway 6 and Main Street (Figure 14). This particular area is in close proximity to downtown and appears to be the only non-vehicular link to the recent north side development.

The use of street planters can also emphasize the significance of a place and display a community’s attention to detail. These planters can also serve as trash receptacles or landscape planters. Street furniture such as benches, tree grates, and guards principally serve as pedestrian amenities but often can enhance area appearance and help maintain improvements by discouraging misusage or abuse (Figure 17).

Not to be overlooked is the incorporation of decorative streets lights into overall design. Street lighting can establish a comfortable environment by improving visibility and creating a sense of safety for all users.

Figure 17: Street Light with Integrated Planter
f. Signage

Restrictions and Design Standards should be put in place to regulate public and private signs. The coordination of community signage can eliminate clutter associated with uncontrolled and inconsistent sign placement. Signs are also essential elements of urban design utilized to notify visitors of areas of particular significance or interest and help orientate users to civic and commercial layout. Therefore, we recommend that the City construct a community welcome sign that promotes community identity as seen in Figure 18 below.

Figure 18. City Welcome Sign
Figure 19: Highway 6 East Corridor Improvements: From Interstate 380 to Tiffin Main Street Intersection
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose:</th>
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<td>Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Incorporate regional trail system proposed throughout neighboring communities and planned in future trail expansion. Appendix D</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Consider Sidewalk and trail improvements on the South side of Highway 6 incorporating the Proposed Park on the south side of the Highway 6.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Widen, grade, and align existing sidewalks to accommodate non-vehicular traffic.</td>
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<td>- Improve area aesthetics and user safety with trail and path lighting</td>
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<td>- Include the use of shade trees for pedestrian comfort and protection from the elements</td>
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<td>- Use evergreen bushes to act as insulator for non vehicular uses, create pedestrian routes, and provide protection from road debris and noise</td>
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<td>- Pocket park on the North side of Highway 6 and Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Landscape planters</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Street Furniture (benches, tree grates, and guards)</td>
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<td>- Decorative streets lights (Design and user comfort)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Construct a community welcome sign that promotes community identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use municipal signs to help orientate users</td>
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</table>
C. Ireland Avenue Recommendations and Improvements

a. Purpose

Ireland Avenue is the primary connector to Interstate-80. It provides access to Tiffin from the south, funneling traffic to Railroad Road then through the center of town. Its significance as a corridor is demonstrated by its proximity to the high school and civic center. Currently Ireland Avenue development is comprised of a small number of agricultural operations and a mobile home park that resides at the intersection of Railroad Road. The organization of natural elements and improvements should help buffer the high-density residential zone from the corridor. Other improvements that should be incorporated into the Ireland Avenue Corridor should be a railroad crossing area. Recommendations are summarized below in Table 3.

b. Roadway

Our recommendation is that the City of Tiffin pursue the alternative route proposed in the Traffic Study for Tiffin (Johnson County Council of Governments, 1998). The Johnson County Council of Governments proposed alternative calls for extending Ireland Avenue north to Highway 6, where it will adjoin with Roberts Ferry Road, which is a county road and will form a functional intersection with Highway 6. This alternative is more practical because it is more direct; it will remove vehicles away from residential streets and will keep heavy traffic away from the front of the school, thereby, providing safer routes for residents, school children, and motorists. However, school property will need to be
purchased in order to secure a wide enough right of way in order to facilitate this alignment. It is our recommendation that this street be designed to urban street standards with curb and gutter, sidewalks, and aesthetics including: lighting, signs, benches and other streetscape improvements.

According to 1992 Tiffin Land Use Plan, the proposed route is to extend from the intersection of Ireland Avenue and Railroad Street, behind and around the school and intersect with Highway 6 several hundred feet west of school property. The land use map alternative will have the opposite of the intended purpose, instead of reducing traffic on residential streets, which now carry the heavier traffic that is accessing I-80 (Figure 20.), the land use alternative will put more traffic in front of the school entrance, especially if other streets such as Grant Street were to be made into cul-de-sacs.

Figure 20: Alternative I-80 Routes
c. Sidewalks

Currently, the only sidewalk accessible along Ireland Avenue terminates at the edge of the rail line, as shown in Figure 21. To remedy this we suggest linking existing sidewalk to the rest of the city, eliminating the dead end. This sidewalk should also be aligned with the north side trail system to improve south side accessibility.

Figure 21: Facing North, the view of sidewalk on the west side of Ireland Avenue. To the west one can see Clear Creek Amana School ground to the east is the mobile home park.
Access to the neighboring Clear Creek Amana Schools and regional trail system should be a priority in this area. The City should use a great degree of foresight in coordinating future streetscape improvements with Ireland Avenue thoroughfare alignment proposed by Johnson County Council of Governments (see Appendix: D). Again the need to widen, grade, and align existing sidewalks to accommodate for bicycles and special needs populations should be integrated into the sidewalk system.

d. Streetscape

The undisturbed natural element and proximity to the Clear Creek flood plain make Ireland Avenue Corridor a unique area as shown in Figure 22. This holding true, the Corridor has a number attributes that the city can capitalize upon. The city should utilize

Figure 22. Ireland Avenue Corridor Facing North

the natural motif and open space of the area to buffer the city from pollution associated
with the interstate and railroad. This can be especially important to the mobile home park, which is relatively exposed to pollution associated with the railroad and vehicular traffic that utilizes Ireland Avenue to access Interstate 80. As shown in Figure 23, the existing trees can be

![Image of Ireland Avenue conditions and DOT sign](image)

Figure 23: Existing Ireland Avenue Conditions and DOT sign, existing trees should lay the foundation for additional improvements.

incorporated into the overall streetscape with only minor alterations. This along with the use of decorative lighting to illuminate south entrance to the community could help establish and promote the appearance of a community gateway.

e. **Landscaping**

Landscaping improvements in this area should be carefully introduced due to the
aesthetics by limiting environmental disruption of existing natural systems. As depicted in Figures 23 and 24, landscaping should be used to buffer the mobile home park with trees on the East Side of Ireland Avenue and the south side of Railroad Road. This should be complimented with the use of evergreen hedges, which would serve as year round buffer once the native deciduous trees lost their foliage in the fall.

Figure 24: Streetscape that can be incorporated to buffer mobile home park from rail and Ireland Avenue traffic. Includes lighting, shade and street trees, evergreen hedges, and rustic rail as design elements.

f. Signage

The primary emphasis of sign improvements along the Ireland Corridor should focus on notifying users that they are entering Tiffin. This could be achieved through the construction of an additional community welcome sign that replaces the barely visible prototypical Iowa Department of Transportation sign as displayed in Figure 23. The minimal commercial activity on Ireland Avenue limits the existing number of visible signs at this time, but additional commercial growth within and around the area presents a future threat. The City would act in its own best interest and be proactive by activating a sign ordinance along the south Ireland Avenue that would eliminate the impact of
sign ordinance along the south Ireland Avenue that would eliminate the impact of commercial signs undermining the natural aesthetics of the area.

Figure 25: Ireland Avenue Corridor Improvements: From south city limits to Railroad Road
### Table 3. Area Recommendations for Ireland Avenue

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D. Highway 6 West Recommendations and Improvements

a. Purpose

Acting as the main commercial district as well as the main corridor that bisects the community into northern and southern sections, Highway 6 plays an integral role in defining the character of Tiffin. In order to capitalize on commercial character, accessibility and mobility should be emphasized in this area in particular. Many of the beautification improvements proposed for Highway 6 West should reflect the motif and improvements of the Highway 6 East Corridor and can be reviewed in Table 4 at the conclusion of this section.

b. Sidewalks

Figure 26: Existing Streetscape of Main Street, Tiffin This makes passage along the southern sidewalk a less attractive option, therefore limiting non-vehicular traffic along the south side of Highway 6.
Because this area is a proposed commercial zone, pedestrian access throughout this area is highly desirable. Currently, a continuous sidewalk runs across the northern edge of the commercial corridor, on the southern side multiple driveways and intersections break up the sidewalk continuity as seen above in Figure 26.

To improve access along the Corridor we recommend that the City extend the trail system on the north side of Highway 6 to promote commercial accessibility from new developments on the north side of town. This would include the establishment of a pathway crossing Highway 6 that would link 'Old' and 'New' Tiffin.

Figure 27: Highway 6 and Main Street Intersection
Figure 28: Highway 6 and Main Street Intersection proposed view includes street lighting, decorative rustic rail, offset sidewalk paving patterned shade trees, curb and gutter, and a civic/scenic sign.

Improvements to the current sidewalk system on the South Side of Highway 6 should include the grading and alignment of existing sidewalks to promote accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, and special needs population (especially on the south side of Highway 6 Figure 29 and 30).
Figure 29: Former site of The Lark, notable super club that was a longtime establishment located on Highway 6 near the center of Tiffin.

Figure 30: Streetscape model of Highway 6 West Corridor Future sidewalk improvements should include cross walks and sidewalk breaks, set off with textured and decorative paving to route non-vehicular users to designated crossing areas.
During school crossing hours the trail crossing at Roberts Ferry Road should be controlled by a pedestrian beacon, it also should be marked with a sign identifying it as a pedestrian crossing and could be marked with decorative paving. In addition, the crossing at Stephens Drive does not completely extend to Highway 6, if and when extended, installation of pedestrian signs and markings should be put in place.

c. Streetscape

Understanding that the commercial corridor is heavily used, beautification should complement the coordination of mutimodal transportation uses. Certain streetscape

Figure 31: Improvements include the use of street lighting, furniture, curb and gutter as well as Appropriate signage requirements.
improvements that could be implemented to accomplish this would include the
separation of conflicting uses with possible curb and gutter improvements. This
effectively separates vehicular and non-vehicular uses with a physical barrier. As
noted by a number of citizens, there have been a number of accidents involving large
trucks winding up in the ditches along side of the corridor. A curb and gutter
improvement would help reduce this dangerous and costly phenomenon. The city
should also consider trail and path street lighting to enhance area aesthetics and user
safety by illuminating the corridor (See Figure 31).

d. Landscaping

Attention to landscaping details along the commercial corridor should help notify
visitors that they are in a place of particular significance to Tiffin. Therefore, the city
may wish to incorporate street trees to unify the overall motif of the area and to
emphasize the natural environmental aesthetics. Including the use of shade trees for
pedestrian comfort and protection from the elements may also be an avenue that
Tiffin may wish to pursue. In order to establish a comfortable environment and
promote non-conflicting land uses Tiffin may opt to use evergreen bushes or hedges
to act as insulator for non vehicular uses, create pedestrian routes, and provide
protection from road debris and noise, this may also be utilized to insulate residences
from commercial zoning conflicts
e. Design Review

A design review ordinance or regulation should be enforced to assure that new development maintains community character and enhances community aesthetics. The passage of additional zoning ordinance on commercial may be prudent. For additional information see Design Review and example Appearance Codes in attached Appendix A and B.

f. Signage

Restrictions and Design Standards should be put in place to regulate public and private signs. The use municipal signs to help orientate users within Tiffin and along the regional trail should be emphasized. As shown in Figure 33, additional areas of significance and travel routes may be highlighted with the use of municipal signs. As for the private sector, the City may be inclined to propose an ordinance requiring private development to adhere to design standards and incorporate business signs and displays to local architectural flavor and style. to reverse situations such as that shown in Figure 34.
Figure 33: Some additional features that could be incorporated into the Highway 6 Commercial Corridor could include the use of street and landscape planters, and street furniture such as benches, tree grates, and guards, and Decorative streets lighting.

Figure 34: Existing Streetscape of Main Street, Tiffin
Figure 35: Highway 6 West Corridor Improvements: From Tiffin Main Street Intersection to Western City Limits
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VI. Conclusion

Beautification along Tiffin’s two major corridors will not only enhance the visual appearance of the environment, but also display a civic commitment to the redevelopment and revitalization of the community. Through cooperative development and the incorporation of sound design and planning principals, the inevitable growth of the region shall not undermine the future vitality of the community. The preservation of the character of Tiffin will require civic leaders and community stakeholders to take a proactive role in shaping the face of development. Increased regulation, community input, and public-private cooperation must be emphasized to assure that development and redevelopment occur at the pace, location, and in the manner that best suits the vision and goals set forth by residents and community leaders.

We would hope that Tiffin could utilize this plan as a springboard to help implement and guide future plans and leverage additional resources for community development projects. The following recommendations were made specific to the City of Tiffin, yet we cannot over-emphasize the importance of the incorporation of a community-wide visioning process exercise that incorporates the goals of Tiffin's entire population.

Next the community visions must be coordinated with design ordinances and appearance codes that support a beautification plan. Attached in Appendix A and B
are design ordinances and appearance codes that have been adopted by Midwestern communities to help maintain community aesthetics in the face of private development pressures. Tiffin must explore the possibility of tailoring their codes and ordinances to support the community vision of the future.

The creation of the municipal codes must set out an authoritative body such as a design review committee. Including various sectors of the population, both public and private, the committee will compliment the Planning and Zoning Commission in the planning and permitting process of development. Here a strong code and ordinance along with the community plan will be most effective in providing developers and committee members a platform to discuss the logistics of future developments. The code will also legitimize committee requirements and help avoid confusion or conflict by establishing clear building requirements that will be mandated as part of the permitting process. By maintaining a clear, well-defined, justified code, developments will not be hindered by various ambiguities often associated with the design review and permitting process.

With the foundation to beautification set, civic and private developers can move harmoniously move forward in redeveloping Tiffin’s community corridors. By maintaining a high development standard while incorporating and orchestrating urban design elements discussed in the Recommendation section, Tiffin shall recreate the sense of place that makes the community unique and demonstrates a commitment to
improving the quality of life for all its citizens. This commitment shall be essential in leveraging external funding sources, identified in Appendix C, and in demonstrating to developers that the community will not tolerate poorly thought out developments that fail to contribute to the overall appearance and well being of the community.

Improvements to the streetscape and roadway shall not only enhance the character of Tiffin but also improve the functionality of such places for various types of users and uses. In general the improvement of sidewalks and streetscape elements such as lighting, signage, and landscaping shall not interfere but improve the character of the Corridors and reveal the significance of the area.

Short-term goals can also be an integral part of the plan. An example goal and possible cornerstone to the corridor is the application of this beautification plan towards properties such as the former site of the Lark Restaurant on Highway 6 as shown in Figure 36 below. If successful, the reconstruction of this long time fixture in Tiffin may allow for Community leaders and private developers to begin a coordinated physical process of beautification.
Figure 36. The site of the former Lark being prepared for a possible rebuild.

The redevelopment of the Lark could be utilized as testimony that beautification is possible and viable within Tiffin. This redevelopment is especially noteworthy due to its historical significance within Tiffin as well as its high profile and centralized location along Highway 6. The business and community both have the opportunity to mutually benefit from the redevelopment. The Lark may rebuild in an area that is slated for progressive redevelopment while the city has an opportunity to demonstrate that beautification is possible and that it is ready to move forward with improving the design and appearance of its corridors.
Appendix A: Criteria for Appearance Codes For Small Communities, City of De Kalb Community Development Department Urban Design Guidelines and Implementation Plan

1) Building Design;

a) Architectural style is not restricted. Evaluation of the appearance of a project shall be based on the quality of its design and its relationship to its surroundings.

b) Buildings should have good scale and be in harmony with permanent neighboring development.

i) Materials shall have architectural character and shall be selected for harmony of the building with adjoining buildings.

ii) Materials shall be selected for suitability to the type of building and the design in which they are used. Buildings shall have the same materials, or those that are architecturally harmonious, used for all building walls and other exterior building components wholly or partially visible to the public.

iii) Materials should be of durable quality

iv) In any design in which the structural frame is exposed to view, the structural materials shall be compatible within themselves and harmonious to their surroundings.

c) Building components, such as windows, doors, eaves, and parapets, shall have
good proportions and relationships to one another.

d) Colors shall be harmonious and shall use only compatible accents.

e) Mechanical Equipment or other utility hardware on roof, ground or buildings shall be screened from public view with materials harmonious with the building, or they shall be so located as not to be visible from any public ways.

f) Exterior lighting shall be part of architectural concepts. Fixtures, standards, and all exposed accessories shall be harmonious with building design.

g) Refuse and waster removal areas, service yards, storage yards, and exterior work areas shall be screened from view from public ways, using materials as stated equipment screening.

h) Monotony of design in single or multiple building projections shall be avoided. Variation of detail, form, and siting shall be used to provide visual interest. In multiple building projects, variable siting or individual buildings may be used to prevent a monotonous appearance.

2) Relationship of building to site;
   a) The site shall be planned to accommodate a desirable transition with the
streetscape and to provide for adequate planting, safe pedestrian movement, and parking areas.

b) Parking areas shall be treated with decorative elements, building wall extensions, plantings, berms, or other innovative means so as to screen parking areas view of public ways.

c) Without restricting the permissible limits of the applicable zoning district, the height and scale of each building shall be compatible with its site and existing (or anticipated) adjoining buildings.

d) Newly installed utility services, and service revisions necessitated by exterior alterations, shall be underground.

3) Relationship of project to adjoining area;

a) Adjacent buildings of different architectural styles shall be made compatible by such means as screens, sight breaks, and materials.

b) Attractive landscape transition to adjoining properties shall be provided.

c) Harmony in texture, lines, and masses is required. Monotony shall be avoided.
4) Landscape and site treatment; Landscape elements included in these criteria consist of all forms of planting and vegetation, ground forms, rock groupings, water patterns, and all visible construction except building and utilitarian structures.

a) Where natural or existing topographic patterns contribute to beauty and utility of a development, they shall be preserved and developed. Modifications to topography will be permitted where it contributes to good appearance.

b) Grades of walks, parking spaces, terraces, and other paved areas shall provide an inviting and stable appearance for walking and if seating is provided, for sitting.

c) Landscape treatment shall be provided to enhance architectural features, strengthen vistas and important axes, and provide shade. Spectacular effects shall be reserved for special locations only.

d) Unity of design shall be achieved by repetition of certain plant varieties and other materials and by correlation with adjacent developments.

e) Plant materials shall be selected for interest in its structure, texture, and color and for its ultimate growth. Indigenous plants that will be hardy, harmonious to the design, and of good appearance shall be used.
f) In locations where plants will be susceptible to injury by pedestrian or motor traffic, appropriate curbs, tree guards, or other devices shall protect them.

g) Parking areas and traffic ways shall be enhanced with landscape spaces containing trees or hedges.

h) Where building sites limit planting, the placement of trees in parkways or paved areas is encouraged.

i) Screening of service yards and other places that tend to be unsightly shall be accomplished by the use of walls, fencing, planting, or combinations of these. Screening should be equally effective throughout the seasons.

j) In areas where general planting will not prosper, other materials such as fences, walls, and paving of wood brick, stone, gravel, and cobbles shall be used. Carefully selected plants shall be combined with such materials where possible.

5) Signs;

a) Every sign will have good scale and proportion in its design and in its visual relationship to buildings and surroundings.
b) Every sign shall be designed as an integral architectural element of the building and site to which it principally relates.

c) The colors, materials, and lighting of every sign shall be restrained and harmonious with the building and site to which it principally relates.

d) The number of graphic elements on a sign shall be held to a minimum needed to convey the sign’s major message and shall be composed in proportion to the area of the sign face.

e) Each sign shall be compatible with signs on adjoining premises and shall not compete for attention.

f) Identification signs of a prototype design and corporation logos shall conform to the criteria for all other signs.

6) Lighting;

a) Exterior lighting, when used, shall enhance the building design and the adjoining landscape. Lighting standards and building fixtures shall be of a design and size compatible with the building and adjacent areas. Lighting shall be restrained in design and excessive brightness avoided.
b) Lighting should be not only functionally appropriate but help promote the overall aesthetics of the area and be harmonious with the local architecture.

7) Miscellaneous Structures and Street Furniture;

a) Miscellaneous structures and street hardware shall be designed to be part of the architectural concept of design and landscape. Materials shall be compatible with buildings, scale shall be good, colors shall be in harmony with buildings and surroundings, and proportions shall be attractive.

b) Lighting in connection with miscellaneous structures and street hardware shall meet the criteria applicable to site, landscape buildings, and signs.

8) Maintenance;

a) Continued good appearance depends upon the extent and quality of maintenance. The choice of materials and their use, together with the types of finishes and other protective measures, must be conducive to easy maintenance and upkeep.

b) Materials and Finishes shall be selected for their durability and wear as well as for their beauty. Proper measures and devices shall be incorporated for
protection against the elements, neglect, damage, and abuse.

c) Provision for washing and cleaning of buildings, and structures, and control of direct and refuse, shall be included in the design. Configurations that trend to catch and accumulate debris, leaves, trash, dirt, and rubbish shall be avoided.

9) Factors for Evaluation;

The following factors and characteristics, which affect appearance of a development, will govern the Appearance Review Commission’s evaluation of a design submission:

a) Conformance to ordinances and the Appearance Code

b) Logic of design

c) Exterior space utilization

d) Architectural character

e) Attractiveness

f) Material selection

g) Harmony and Compatibility

h) Circulation-vehicular and pedestrian

i) Maintenance aspects
Appendix B: Excerpts concerning Design Review As Described by the American Planning Association

The use of design review for the purposes of Tiffin Corridor Beautification can expedite the process required to substantially alter the existing environment of the corridor area and set precedence for new development that will locate within Tiffin Jurisdiction.

The role of design review as described by the American Planning Association is the “Process by which the design of a new building or an existing building undergoing substantial rehabilitation is reviewed in order to protect the economic value of properties surrounding it; to make sure that the new building complies with the design and the land use criteria that affect the character, use, and overall development”. (APA eds., 1984).

Design review can assume many forms from an informal meeting to a formalized commission hearing but the basic intent of design review should go beyond the mere aesthetics of the building to how development can be integrated into the functional fabric of the city. Design review should seek to avoid problems before the building is constructed, and help developers understand the potential of a site and how it relates to the rest of the community.

It is important to differentiate the role of the private sector from the role that only
city government can play. There are many different ways that the design of a new
development can be influenced. There are two ways that the city can legally enforce
design criteria. The first is through zoning. Most zoning ordinances however do not
deal at the level of architectural detail important to the real functional impact of a
building on an area (APA eds., 1984).

Incentive zoning ordinances in combination with some formal design review
procedure. Here developers are allowed to build buildings that are larger than what is
normally permitted as long as they provide amenities and if their plans are approved
by a planning commission or other official body (APA eds., 1984).

In addition to zoning many cities have instituted mandatory design review
commissions. These commissions typically review all new construction and
renovations that occurs within a defined area. In addition the commissions have the
ability to deny building permits if the building does not meet certain criteria or

From a developers point of view it is important that any design review procedure has
clear criteria so that precious time is not wasted. Developers should be given
guidelines and an outline of planning and urban design concerns in the early stages of
a project. This document should be adopted by an official design review board as the
basis for its evaluation (APA eds., 1984).
In general the American Planning Association identifies the following 9 topics as relevant criteria to be included in appearance codes for small communities. Based on these recommendations the city of Highland Park, Illinois has successfully adopted and implemented the following guidelines to help developers focus on design principals. These codes are supplemented with design recommendations that are especially well defined and utilized by other Midwestern communities.
Appendix C: Programs and Policies Available as Beautification Funding and Support
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| Main Street USA                                      | Help Communities to revitalize their historic or traditional commercial areas through through planning and local participation | 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: 202.588.6219  
Fax: 202.588.6050  
www.mainst.org | 100% of the funds are either local or state |
| Main Street Iowa D.E.D.                             | To Improve social and economic well-being of Iowa's Communities       | 200 East Grand Avenue Des Moines, IA 50309 | Phone: 515.242.4733  
Fax: 515.242.4809  
www.state.ia.us/ided/crd/mainstreet | 100% state $86,000 to $100,000 Initial funding by state and $10,000 annually |
| Rural Development Rural Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community Program | Aid communities that have high rates of poverty in planning and economic development | Federal Building 210 Walnut Street, Suite 873, Des Moines IA 50309 | Phone: 515-284-4383  
fax: 515-284-4859  
www.ezec.gov/ | $250,000 to $2,000,000 |
| The Division of Community and Rural Development      | strives to continually develop the economic well-being and quality of life of Iowans by working with local governments and Community organizations | 200 East Grand Avenue Des Moines, IA 50309 | Contact Cali Beals  
Phone: 515.242.4723  
cali.beals@ided.state.ia.us | N/A |
| Revitalization Assistance for Community Improvement (RACI) Grant Program | RACI grants target cities in Iowa with a population base of 30,000 or less according to the latest available census | 200 East Grand Avenue Des Moines, IA 50309 | http://www.state.ia.us/ided/crd/raci/index.html | Substantial amount to leverage local contribution |
| DOT/DNR Fund                                         | funds Roadside Beautification                                         | Iowa Department of Transportation  
http://www.dot.state.ia.us/ | http://www.dot.state.ia.us/fundguide.pdf | Must be on Federal Aid Highway System Rights |
| Revitalization Iowa's Sound Improvement (RISE) Program | Seeks to promote economic development by funding road construction | Iowa Department of Transportation  
http://www.dot.state.ia.us/ | http://www.dot.state.ia.us/fundguide.pdf | Based on Job Creation |
| Surface Transportation Program                      | Funds Projects on Federal Aid Highway System                         | Iowa Department of Transportation  
http://www.dot.state.ia.us/ | http://www.dot.state.ia.us/fundguide.pdf | Must be on Federal Aid Highway System |
| Pedestrian Curb Ramp Construction Program            | Assist Cities to Comply with The ADA                                  | Iowa Department of Transportation  
http://www.dot.state.ia.us/ | http://www.dot.state.ia.us/fundguide.pdf | $100,000 |
| Urban State Transportation Engineering Program       | Municipal Extension of a Primary Road                                 | Iowa Department of Transportation  
http://www.dot.state.ia.us/ | http://www.dot.state.ia.us/fundguide.pdf | From $200,000 to $400,000 depending on the improvement |
| Federal Tranposition Enhancement Program              | Fund enhancement and preservation of transportation related project  | Iowa Department of Transportation  
| Traffic Safety Improvement Program (TSIP)             | Funds Traffic Safety Improvements                                     | Iowa Department of Transportation  
http://www.dot.state.ia.us/ | http://www.dot.state.ia.us/fundguide.pdf | $250,000 |
Appendix D: Johnson County Ireland Alternative I-80 Route.

Alternative I-80 Routes
TIFFIN, IOWA

TIFFIN LAND USE PLAN PROPOSED I-80 ROUTE

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE I-80 ROUTE

JCCOG
VIII. Work Cited


City of Tiffin, Iowa. 1998. Land Use Regulations.


IX. Additional Sources


Iowa Department of Transportation. Staff Action Memo. Speed Zones on US 6 in Tiffin- Johnson County. 4/13/98.


