The role of the city administrator and small town planning: a qualitative study of Iowa's small town managers

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The role of the city administrator and small town planning:
a qualitative study of Iowa’s small town managers.

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Program of Study Committee:
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ABSTRACT

Small town city administrators have the responsibility of managing all functions for the community in which they are employed, but often lack the resources of their larger counterparts to devote to specific city functions such as planning. This includes planning and development functions.

Studies show that city administrators, in all sizes of cities, have varying roles that accompany their positions. For the purpose of this study, those roles have been separated into traditional/technical roles, and contemporary/proactive roles. This study questions whether these roles impact the quality of small town planning.

Through surveys and interviews with small town Iowa administrators, and review of documentation, this study is somewhat inconclusive on whether the administrators’ perceived roles impact planning in their respective communities. Thus, this study first discusses possible conclusions that can be drawn from the research, and more importantly, outlines further research that would strengthen the study.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This thesis, through the use of qualitative research, is designed to provide a glimpse into one of the inert issues faced by the typical Midwestern small town which utilizes a city manager/administrator as part of the city government structure. Due to a number of factors, the small town city manager/administrator is directly responsible for the policy development and implementation of virtually every city function. It is likely, however, that manager/administrator may not possess the capacity in terms of resources and/or skill base to deal with every imaginable city issue. Most applicable to this study, these appointed city officials often are also designated as the zoning administrator and are responsible for every facet of land use for the city, from policy development to implementation, including the development process. Therefore, this research is concerned with how land use planning or community development functions are facilitated by these small town managers/administrators.

At the same time, we find that managers/administrators often perceive the roles of their position differently. Likewise, there may be a number of factors which dictate the way an individual perceives his or her role. Often, city managers/administrators assume certain roles because of the expectations of the governing body to which they serve (Ammons and Newell, 1989). Likewise, the roles perceived by these small town managers/administrators may be a function of the educational background, discipline, or simply past experience (Green, 1989). Although it is important to acknowledge that there are certain factors that influence the way administrators perceive certain roles, the main concern of this study is the effectiveness of the manager/administrator to conduct the planning function for their community as it relates to these perceived roles. Thus, the primary focus of this research is to study the following question:

- How do the perceived roles of the small town manager/administrator in Iowa impact the quality of planning in that Iowa community?
Thus, in order to analyze this question, one must also answer two other essential questions:

- What are the different perceived roles of managers/administrators and planners?
- What is considered good planning practice for small towns?

The following discusses how this document addresses these questions and results in the formation of recommendations to increase the prospect of good small town planning in Iowa communities, as well as some basic opportunities for future research.

**Thesis Organization**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter briefly introduces the reader to the scenario being studied, as well as the format for the remainder of the document. Chapter Two, the *Review of Literature*, discusses some key background information, setting a foundation for the study. The review of literature begins by discussing both the roles of administrators as well as the roles of planners. Specifically, the general roles of the administrator are divided into those of a traditional nature, and more contemporary characteristics. The literature suggests that there may be similarities between the roles of the planner and the contemporary roles of the administrator. This is followed in that same chapter by a discussion of the different planning tools used by the typical small town. These include the comprehensive plan, the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and the capital improvements program. Through the discussion of these basic planning elements, the chapter communicates the general aspects which might represent good planning in a small community. These traits include certain components which should be included in the comprehensive plan, the use of other resources such as private firms or councils of governments, a focus on economic sustainability, and relationship of policy to the comprehensive plan.
Chapter three discusses the methodology involved in the study. Specifically, this chapter addresses the different aspects of case study research. The chapter is organized by the phases of a case study protocol as it applies to this research. The chapter begins by discussing the basis for qualitative research as it applies to this study and the questions asked. Next, chapter three describes case studies, and more specifically the types of case studies used in this research. More particularly, this study utilized a survey, in-depth interviews, and review of documentation. The chapter then goes on to discuss in more detail the surveys conducted as part of this study, and the rationale behind the selection of questions. The chapter follows by linking the results of the survey to the interviews conducted as part of this research. Five interviews were conducted with small town administrators as part of this research, selected based on opinions given in the survey regarding the perceived roles of their position. This is followed with a discussion about the review of documentation that was conducted as a means of evaluating the level of planning in each community where an interview was conducted. In this research, the primary documentation studied was the comprehensive plan. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of a case study protocol for this research, utilized in an attempt to preserve the internal validity of the study.

Chapter four of this document discusses in detail the results of the survey and interviews conducted as part of the case study. The chapter begins with an in-depth review of the survey instrument, as well as responses given by fifteen responding city managers. It is noted at this time, however, that the responding participants may not be indicative of the population of a whole. Rather, this does allow for a means by which more in-depth interviews could be selected, while giving the reader a snapshot of the individuals (and communities) that responded. Following this is a discussion of the interviews conducted with five selected city administrators, which were conducted at each of their respective cities. Each of these interviews is described in terms of predetermined criteria for the evaluation of the role of the administrator as well as
quality of planning in the community. Finally, the chapter reviews the interviews as a whole, and draws several conclusions from the results.

The fifth and final chapter of this document is a series of recommendations and opportunities for future research. This chapter begins with setting forth some recommendations to potential small town administrators, and how they can be effective in creating and implementing planning policies in their respective communities. Finally, the chapter and thesis concludes with a description of some opportunities for future research that was created from this study. Often times in case study research, the researcher can find as many questions as answers. In the case of this particular study, there were a number of factors that could not be completely accounted for as they were outside the direct scope of the study. Therefore, these questions pose excellent opportunities to build from this research.

Significance of the Study

As a lifestyle choice, there will always be a segment of the population that desires to live in a small town. One of the pull factors toward living in a small community is the personal level of local government. When compared to larger urban communities, it can be argued that the potential for personal interaction and face-to-face contact with elected and appointed officials is more likely to occur, making the government system arguably one of the most responsive to citizens’ needs (Banovetz, Dolan, and Swain, 1994). However, just because a community is smaller does not mean that its citizens expect a significantly lower level of service. With an increasing complexity of services, along with the fact that local elected officials are typically average townspeople who are not paid for their service and cannot devote the time necessary to oversee all city functions, this places an elevated amount of responsibility on the small town
administrator or manager who is charged with the responsibility to oversee the community functions, inclusive of planning functions.

Likewise, as administrators develop professionally, they assume certain roles as part of their position. This study is concerned with the perception of that role and its impact on the effectiveness of planning in the community. In other words, the role (and mindset) of an administrator may have a direct impact on the way a small town continues to develop and evolve. This is significant in that administrators, or potential administrators, need to know that a certain approach toward traditional or more progressive (contemporary) roles of the position may make the difference between a growing and thriving community, and one that is destined to remain stagnant or declining. This research attempts to gain insight into the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of perceived roles as they apply to city planning and development (Banovetz, Dolan, and Swain, 1994) (Ford, Lopach, O’Donnell, 1990).
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When conducting any research, a discussion of related literature is necessary to establish a foundation for the study. In this sense, the review of literature serves several purposes. First, the literature review establishes basic information on which the study is based, along with assumptions used in the creation of the research framework. Second, the review of literature also establishes current knowledge of the topic being studied (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Thus, for the purpose of this research, this review of literature will contain four primary sections.

This review first includes a discussion of the roles of the administrator as well as the roles of the planner. Next, as this study is highly concerned with policy development and implementation, there is a discussion of the common forms of planning policy. Third, to better understand the possible constraints on small town planning policy, the literature review will outline small town planning issues such as economic development, the decline in downtown business, and exurban development trends. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of some characteristics for good planning as a foundation to analyze the primary data collected during this research.

Role of the Planner v. the Role of the Administrator/Manager

The primary line of inquiry within this research is the role of the city administrator or manager in planning in Iowa. Typically, larger communities with more resources have the administrator and city planning duties separated into two departments with specialized staff for different functions. This research makes the assumption that in small communities with fewer resources, the city administrator also acts as the city planner. Thus, this first section of the literature review attempts to ascertain the separate roles of the city administrator and the city planner. These roles may then be compared and contrasted (Daniels, Keller, and Lapping, 1995).
It is also important to point out at this time that the term city administrator and city manager may be interchanged through the remainder of this document.

Role of the Administrator

The most basic description of the position of city manager may best be illustrated by using principal-agent theory. This theory begins by dividing the hierarchical system of local government into two groups: the principals comprised of the elected officials, and their agents, public employees that work within the local government bureaucracy. The public employees are accountable to elected officials, even though each is actually a self-interested actor. Thus, the elected officials must attempt to maintain some level of control over the agents. However, it is also assumed that information is shared symmetrically between the elected officials and bureaucrats, and that the bureaucrats understand the preferences of elected decision-makers. In this line of thinking, the city manager may best be described as a bureaucratic agent with technical expertise. However, the city manager is somewhat of an exception in that he or she acts as a liaison between the bureaucracy, the public, and the elected officials, he or she has some involvement in politics and policymaking, and he or she typically has some decision-making capability. This view of the city manager allows us to view several different roles of the position. In a study published in the *American Review of Public Administration* in 1999 gives some insight to these roles from the administrator’s point of view as the key agent in the organization (Selden, Brewer, and Brudney, 1999).

Traditional Role Typology

The aforementioned study created a two-by-two typology of city manager roles based on the involvement of the manager in the policy process and the extent of autonomy exercised (see
Figure 2.1). These role typologies created were the passive agent, the administrative technician, the policy technician, and the active manager. However, even before discussing these typologies, specific managerial roles may be deduced from the assumptions made in the study. The first assumption is that the manager plays a significant policy development role through making recommendations to the elected officials. Second, the manager presents decision makers with information on the feasibility of policy implementation. Third, the manager supports the council by communicating community needs and initiating policy proposals. Finally, the manager meets with individual elected officials to clarify perspectives and policy preferences (Selden, et al., 1999).

**Figure 2.1: Four Types of City Managers (N = 1,073)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Autonomy</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive Agent</td>
<td>4.38% of City Managers</td>
<td>Policy Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.38% of City Managers</td>
<td>Policy Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 47</td>
<td>n = 161</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Technician</td>
<td>10.34% of City Managers</td>
<td>Active Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>10.34% of City Managers</td>
<td>Active Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 111</td>
<td>n = 754</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Selden, et al. 1999*

The study states that over seventy percent of city managers perceive they fall into the category of being an active manager. This translates into the view that the manager has a high level of autonomy and is highly involved with the policy development process. In other words, the majority of managers play a significant role in the development of policy. Likewise, the study shows that the majority of city managers take an active leadership role when it comes to the initiation and implementation of policy. However, the study also shows that those that fall into the active manager category are also more likely to work for larger cities, have a longer tenure, and to be a member of the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA).
Thus, this category of city manager may not be as likely to personify the smaller cities included in this case study.

The second largest manager role type is the *policy technician*, comprising fifteen percent of the managers surveyed. These managers are active in initiating policy and advising decision makers regarding policy. However, policy technicians have little autonomy in directing administrative activities. This type of manager has close connections with the city council, but has limited influence on budgetary policy, administrative activities, or staffing. Those managers which fall into this category, however, are also less likely to be ICMA members and are likely to have had a shorter tenure (Selden, et al., 1999).

The underlying roles of both the *active manager* and *manager as technician* have been described in other research as a *policymaker* or policy *innovator*. A 1985 survey of local government chief executive officers found that the area of policy innovation and formulation was deemed the most important aspect of the manager’s job (Selden, et al., 1999). Likewise, eighty percent of managers responding to a survey in 1987-1988 agreed with the statement that the manager “should assume leadership in shaping municipal policies.” Furthermore, in a 1973 survey of city councils, it was found that the council expects the manager to be highly involved with policy formulation and initiation (Nalbandian, 1991).

The *passive agent* and *administrative technicians* are the typologies shown to be most predominant in smaller cities with an elected mayor. Just over four percent of the city managers surveyed fall into the passive agent category. This typology is the most representative of principal-agent theory. These managers have a low level of autonomy and are the least involved in the policy process and act primarily as an agent of the elected body. The administrative technician type was found to represent just over ten percent of the surveyed managers. These managers have a high level of autonomy in directing the administrative activities of the city and implementing policy set forth by the city council, as well as the formulation of the budget and
making key staffing decisions. However, these managers are not likely to be key players in the actual formulation of city policy (Selden, et al., 1999).

**Contemporary Roles**

The aforementioned, mostly technical roles of the administrator are fixed as key components in describing the role of the manager in council-manager government, both actually and normatively. The professional local government manager is still accountable to the governing body, and his or her position has a focus on application of professional knowledge and expertise regarding problems found at the local level of government. Thus the role of the manager is rooted in policy-making (to some extent, with the ultimate power in the hands of elected officials) and administration. However, recent literature suggests that the actual role and the normative values of the professional administrator reach beyond technical expertise and into the realms of political involvement, brokering of community power, and ensuring citizen involvement and participation (Nalbandian, 1991).

**Political as well as Technical (Administrative)**

Another typology which is commonly cited in the study of the roles of the city manager in council-manager governments was created through a study conducted by Ronald Loveridge as amended by Ammons and Newell (1989). The study also included four primary manager types based on political leadership: political leaders, political executives, administrative directors, and administrative technicians. Political leaders are the most political, and typically represent a broad policy role, serving as a change agent within city government. A political executive type of manager is slightly more conservative when it comes to the policy role of the position, usually due to community values or out of respect for the authority of the city council. Administrative directors believe that the manager should be involved in policy process, but typically leave
policy innovation to elected officials. Loveridge’s administrative technician role type falls well in line with the passive agent in the previously mentioned study, representing a more pure interpretation of the politics-administration dichotomy. Thus, the administrative technicians see themselves as the implementers of policy, staying out of the policy decision making process (Ammons and Newell, 1989).

A key to the role of the city manager has always been in policy-making. However, due to contemporary political, social, and economic forces, the role of the manager has moved ever more toward negotiating, brokerage, and consensus-building. These roles are thought to have developed based on factors such as the personality of the manager, expectations of others, and even expectations of the city council members. Today’s manager is commonly called upon by the city’s governing body to negotiate with developers on local projects or in dealing with intergovernmental issues, still requiring a high level of technical expertise, but extending beyond typical policy formulation activities. Furthermore, the contemporary manager has also been described as more of a political liaison within the city government than was noted in the past. The manager has been somewhat transformed to a position that acts as an intermediary between elected officials and an ever more professionalized and technically skilled city workforce (Nalbandian, 1991).

Broker of Community Power

Research in the late 1980s emphasized the need to recognize the previously-mentioned role of the administrator as a broker of power (Nalbandian, 1991). These studies reinforce the view that a manager’s job entails negotiating, coordinating, brokering, and other consensus-building activities. Survey research during this time period showed that the most important skills a manager possesses include analysis of the community’s political situation, assessing, handling interpersonal relations, and bargaining/negotiating, while the least important skills identified
were more basic administrative roles such as operational analysis, job analysis, and writing policy statements and reports. In a similar study by Nalbandian (1991) using direct observation, the results showed that a manager’s time is primarily spent in direct contact with another individual (with only twenty-two percent of the manager’s time spend on solitary work). Thirty-seven percent of that time was designated as being spent as a broker, which involved sharing knowledge, educating, negotiating, and instigating communication by creating linkages between people and groups (Nalbandian, 1991).

Community/Consensus Building (Citizen Participation)

Based on studies conducted in the 1990s by John Nalbandian, another key emerging role of community leadership was identified as community building. On top of organizing tasks, anticipating timelines, and allocating resources for community action, the manager also bears the burden of leading the community and elected officials through visioning processes. Research found that managers are expected to facilitate participation and develop partnerships while ensuring balanced representation and maintaining equity. Again, consensus building does not completely alienate the technical roles of the manager as a knowledge base, source of analytical skill, or the ability of the manager to integrate theory and practice. Rather, as part of the professional skill set of the manager, he or she needs to possess the ability to foster public involvement and participation in the policy process (Nalbandian and Oliver, 1999; Hirt, 2004).

More specifically, the studies identified three kinds of actions that were determined to be the foundation of community building. The first is to provide goods, services, and facilities for residents more efficiently than they could if they had to purchase them individually. Second, these goods should be provided in a manner that respects the values of democracy, representation, equity, and individual rights. Third, community building should encourage residents to act as citizens of government rather than subjects. This role of the manager is not
found in getting involved in electoral politics, but rather involvement in public hearings, discussions, deliberations, and training others within the city structure to anticipate and promote participation (Nalbandian and Oliver, 1999).

ICMA Code of Ethics and the Role of the Administrator

A final source to which we may look to clarify the role of the city manager is the ICMA Code of Ethics (1998). Much of the ICMA Code appears to align with Loveridge’s administrative director (Ammons and Newell, 1989) or administrative technician or Selden’s passive agent or administrative technician typologies (Selden, et al., 1999). The code directs managers that they should recognize that the elected decision makers are “entitled to the credit for the establishment of local government policies,” and that the members of local government (presumably referring to city staff) are responsible for policy execution. Likewise, the manager should not participate in elections of local officials. However, the code also allows for more of an active role in stating that managers should “submit policy proposals to elected officials; provide them with facts and advice on matters of policy as a basis for making decisions,” and to “assist the governing body in presenting issues involved in referenda.” The code also moves somewhat outside the typologies discussed above to making direct reference to involving and informing the citizenry, and encouraging communication between citizens and decision makers (International City/County Managers Association, 1998).

Role of the Planner

Literature concerning the role of the city planner differs from the role of the manager in that it tends to focus on more specific aspects inherent to, or expected of the position rather than an explanation of the overall role in local government. One good basis for studying the role of
the planner is the definition given by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). The AICP (1991) outlines the following criteria to define professional planning. First, a planner influences public decision making in the interest of the public. Planners do this through making recommendations to decision makers regarding social, economic, or physical change within the community. Second, a planner employs an “appropriately comprehensive point of view.” An appropriately comprehensive point of view requires evaluating consequences of decisions in regards to the larger context in which they occur, and treating multiple policies, actions, or systems simultaneously when they are linked in such a way as they may not be treated in isolation. The third duty of a professional planner is the application of an appropriate planning process. The appropriateness of the process involves prescribing the number and order of steps, the orientation to the future regarding resource constraints and community values, the level and quality of analysis, and format proposed for the policy, program, or plan (Kelly and Becker, 2000).

A 1992 survey conducted by the American Planning Association (APA) elaborates on the AICP definition by studying the more specific roles played by planners. Most planners surveyed indicated that they spent most of the time on plan making and government regulation (Hoch, Dalton, and So, 2000). This goes along with the idea that one of the primary roles of a planner is to draft and enforce land use policy in the community in order to control development (Kaiser,Godschalk, and Chapin, 1995). The role of the planner as policy maker and enforcer is said to be especially representative of planners who work in growing communities. Other key planning roles noted in the survey included design review, neighborhood planning, transportation planning, economic development, and statistical technician (Hoch, et al., 2000).

Two other significant roles of the planner mentioned in the literature are as a consensus builder and communicator. Conflict management is also often mentioned with consensus building, mediation, and negotiation. The planner is often caught between the visions of citizen
interest groups, values of local elected officials, and demands of developers (Kaiser and Godschalk, 1995). In this sense, planners possess the role of balancing the ideals and needs of government, special interests (including the wants and needs of citizen groups), and market-oriented players (such as developers, realtors, investors, and individual land owners). The planner must then also be a broker for the wants and needs of the aforementioned groups in formulating planning policy (Kaiser, et al., 1995).

However, ultimately the power of planners is limited by the fact that they do not possess decision making authority in regards to changing policy. Therefore, referencing back to the AICP definition of a planner in the first paragraph of this section, other crucial planning roles in the decision making process are analysis and communication. Specifically, planners are called upon by local elected officials to first act as a technician and research policy alternatives. However, the planner does not simply conduct policy research by sorting through documents, but is also required to solicit and take into account the viewpoint of those players in the community which would be affected by the policy. The second step, which is as important as the first, is to effectively convey this recommendation to the city’s decision makers. There are generally three bodies of local decision makers to which planners must communicate: the planning and zoning commission which makes recommendations to the city council, the city council which makes final decisions, and the zoning board of adjustments which makes final rulings on granting zoning variances. This staff communication to these boards comes in the form of prepared reports discussing the details and ramifications of policy alternatives, along with a recommendation for what is thought to be the most desirable option. It is also crucial that the planner possess good oral communication skills as they are often required to explain and justify the proposed policy alternatives in public meetings (Gitelman, Nolon, Salkin, and Wright, 2004).
AICP Code of Ethics and the Role of the Planner

A final source in determining the role of the planner is the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (1991). The first requirement listed in the AICP Code of Ethics states that the planner’s primary obligation is to protect the public interest. This is supported by subsequent requirements, including an emphasis on long range consequences of current action, attention to the interrelatedness of decisions, providing clear and accurate information, striving to include citizen stakeholders in the decision making process, and a concern for the environment (both natural and built). Second, a planner is required to pursue the employer/client’s interests while not abandoning the duty to the public interest. This section of the code places an emphasis on exercising professional judgment while maintaining a willingness to accept the decision of elected officials. This section also essentially states that a planner should not use their position for personal gain, and acknowledges the need for confidentiality of the employer when appropriate. Finally, the code states that planners should contribute to further development of the discipline by improving techniques, making work relevant to the community, and increasing public knowledge of planning issues (American Institute of Certified Planners, 1991).

Summary of Roles

There are a number of similarities and differences among the roles of city managers and planners. The first similarity, as referenced by the code of conduct for both professions, is that both have a duty to act in the public interest. In the AICP code, the duty to the public is more pronounced as it is directed to be “a planner’s primary obligation” (American Institute of Certified Planners, 1991). The ICMA code is less direct in saying that it is the “chief function of local government to serve the local interest of all of the people” (International City/County Managers Association, 1998). This use of the phrase “all of the people” implies that managers
should be inclusive of citizens and key community players in the decision making process. The code for planners has more expanded language on the idea of citizen inclusion with phrases such as, “give citizens the opportunity to have a meaningful impact” and “expand choice and opportunity for all persons” (American Institute of Certified Planners, 1991).

Second, both conduct policy research and make policy recommendations to decision makers. Roles tend to differ slightly in this area as “planning policy” specifically refers to the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and other issues involving land use. Managers, on the other hand, seem to focus more on general city policy and budgeting.

A third similarity is that both are technically agents of the local governing body. However, this is where the primary role distinction between the two disciplines seems to exist. The roles of the planner (such as the technician role) seem to be a more pure fit to the description of the agent in the principal agent theory. A key role for planners is to gather information throughout the community and conduct analysis in such a way as a rational, technical recommendation can be made to the decision making body. The position of the manager as an agent seems to exhibit more of a range and can be somewhat dependant on the situation.

**Planning Policy**

This portion of the literature review will look at the different forms of planning policy and the way each form is implemented. This section will begin with a discussion of the comprehensive plan, the local government’s long-term guide to the formulation of specific policy. This will be followed by a description of the capital improvements program (CIP), the city’s mid-range policy guideline and a link between the comprehensive plan, the budget, and other immediate planning policy decisions. Finally, this section will talk about current planning policies, which are commonly written into city code. The two most common current planning
policies used for everyday decision making are the zoning ordinance and the subdivision regulations. This section, though, will also briefly touch on other current planning policy areas such as building codes and design regulations.

Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan, sometimes called a *master plan* or *general plan*, is a composite representation of what a community strives to be in the future, created in the form of a document or documents. The formats of comprehensive plans vary by locale and may consist of a brief report or as several volumes. Likewise, some plans rely heavily on graphical representation through maps, figures, and pictures, while others utilize written descriptions. However different the formats of plans, they need to be comprehensive in terms of three key factors. First, the plan should be comprehensive in terms of geographical coverage. This means that the document should be inclusive of all of the physical land area that is subject to the regulations of that particular government jurisdiction. Second, the plan should be comprehensive in terms of subject matter. The comprehensive plan should take into account all city functions, as well as linkages to social and economic programs. Third, the plan should be a long-range plan, commonly ten to twenty years. Longer time frames make it less likely the city will be able to accurately forecast its needs, while shorter time frames arguably constrict the comprehensive thinking that should be included in the document. This long term time frame, though, makes it a necessity to review and revise the plan when necessary as the comprehensive plan should be a living document (Kelly and Becker, 2000; Kaiser and Godschalk, 1995).

Another key aspect of the comprehensive plan is that it should be a guide to decision-makers. The plan should guide general and specific policy decisions in areas such as city zoning or rezoning, subdivision of land, expansion of infrastructure, and annexation. In many cases, the
government body directly responsible for the comprehensive plan is the planning commission. The planning commission, though, is not a local level government decision-making body. Rather, the planning commission makes recommendations to the city council for final approval, as in virtually any official municipal government policy decision. The planning commission and city council, though, rely on city staff, for recommendations (Kelly and Becker, 2000; Daniels, et al., 1995).

Capital Improvements Program

Another primary tool in local government planning is the capital improvements program or CIP. The CIP generally covers five to ten years, a mid-range timeframe relative to the other planning tools described in this section, and identifies capital projects to be financed by the city and implemented in the time frame covered, theoretically based on the need for the project (based on a ranking system and availability of funds). Capital projects are defined as substantial long-term investments, usually in city infrastructure and facilities. It should be noted, however, that the term “substantial investment” is relative and the definition is specific to each local unit of government. In other words, a substantial investment to the City of Adel, Iowa (population of approximately 3500), is likely to be different than a substantial investment to the City of Des Moines (Hoch, et al., 2000).

The legal framework for capital budgeting varies by jurisdiction. In many cases, local governments do not have the statutory legal obligation to develop a CIP. Other local governments may be statutorily obligated to plan capital improvements, with the statute outlining specific time-frames and definitions for the municipality (Tigue, 1996). Regardless, the CIP is considered a very important tool to local governments in terms of planning and financial management; and all governments, despite legal obligation, should prepare a CIP (Tigue, 1996).
The CIP serves a variety of important purposes within local government. First and foremost (for planning purposes), the CIP provides a link to the long-range comprehensive plan. The CIP should rely on the long-range plan for community goals, land use patterns, as well as socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, population and economic projections of the jurisdiction. These factors included in the comprehensive plan should then be applied to the analysis of infrastructure and facility needs such as public buildings, new roads, water and sewer facilities and other city assets (Tigue, 1996).

A second purpose of the CIP is as a reporting document. The linkage of facility development to the comprehensive planning process found in the CIP is one of the cornerstones of growth management (Hoch, et al., 2000). This is the idea that development is heavily driven by the location of public facilities and infrastructure. The CIP communicates city investment priorities to citizens, businesses, financial institutions and developers, and allows them to make decisions accordingly. Some states, such as Florida, even require the availability of facilities and infrastructure prior to development, a concept known as concurrency (Hoch, et al., 2000; Tigue, 1996).

Two other purposes of the CIP are the use of the document (and process) as a formal mechanism for decision-making and as financial management tool. Arguably, the most fundamental function of a CIP is to organize capital needs, planning, and budgeting into one orderly process. Through this process, the local government systematically determines what to buy, build, or repair, in which location, and how to finance the project. In theory, this process would also require intergovernmental cooperation in order to resolve possible scheduling difficulties. Also, the intergovernmental coordination, along with a multiyear focus, helps the CIP to ensure financial stability by anticipating financial needs for the municipal government and avoiding overlapping or conflicting projects, let alone projects where costs can be shared with different government units. In turn, the CIP prevents wasting resources (Tigue, 1996).
The staff member responsible for the CIP is generally called the CIP coordinator. Literature suggests that the appointment of a CIP coordinator should be a priority of the legislative body or administrator. It is preferable that the coordinator be full time staff, as the individual has the duty of ensuring the CIP moves forward as scheduled, and communication and coordination skills are crucial because CIP work involves activities with many individuals and groups. The CIP coordinator, though, may not be a single position, but rather a CIP committee (Tigue, 1996).

Zoning Ordinance

The first significant tool toward current planning discussed in this chapter is the zoning ordinance. Zoning is the most common means of regulating land uses at the municipal level in the United States. Zoning as we know it in America has arguably not changed much since states passed initial zoning enabling legislation and the form of regulation was legitimized by the United States Supreme Court in Euclid v. Ambler Reality in the 1920s (Gitelman, Morton, Salkin, and Wright, 2004). The use of Euclidian zoning is infamous in smaller communities such as the cities on which this research focuses (Daniels, et al., 1995; Gitelman, Morton, Salkin, and Wright, 2004).

Euclidian zoning has three general purposes. The first is to separate conflicting land uses. Second, zoning is a means of enforcing the comprehensive plan, and thus should reflect the goals and guidelines provided in the plan. Third, the ordinance should promote quality development in terms of preserving and promoting the health, safety, and welfare of the citizenry (Daniels, et al., 1995).

A zoning ordinance is comprised of two main elements. In typical Euclidian zoning, a map shows the jurisdiction separated into land use districts, using the common generalized
categories of residential, commercial, industrial, and public/semipublic. Each district typically has a different level of intensity. For instance, within the heading of residential, there is typically several different zoning districts (generally called R-1, R-2, etc.), with each identifying varied intensities or densities of land use (single-family residential, duplexes, apartments, etc.).

The second element is the written zoning ordinance. The ordinance explains the purpose of each specific district, the uses permitted (and conditionally permitted), and development standards (such as setbacks and bulk requirements). The regulations for each zoning district may also reference such things as other provisions of the zoning ordinance, landscape requirements, and the sign ordinance. The ordinance also includes fee structures as well as the procedures for amending both the zoning map and text, including public hearing requirements which are usually set by the state (Daniels, et al., 1995; Hoch, et al., 2000).

Zoning is generally conducted by a zoning administrator. The ordinance identifies an official within the local government to be the enforcement officer of the ordinance. The individual in this position generally possesses the power to grant permits, but other enforcement actions may also be included in the zoning administrator’s duties. In terms of granting permits, the zoning administrator reviews development proposals in terms of the regulations for the specific location where the development is located. Thus, this individual should be a full-time city employee as they often need to answer the questions of general citizens and developers. This staff member is typically responsible for posting notices for public hearings, and makes recommendations (through staff reports and verbal recommendations during public hearings) regarding items that require council approval. Furthermore, these staff recommendations should be based on policy set forth in the comprehensive plan (Daniels, et al., 1995; Hoch, et al., 2000).

There are some areas of concern when it comes to the zoning ordinance, especially in smaller municipalities. One of the major criticisms is that zoning can bestow economic benefits on some land owners while causing some potential economic loss to others. The intention of
zoning is to balance the protection of the rights of individual property owners with the health, safety, welfare, and orderly development of the community. However, conflict is inherent to the zoning system as Euclidian zoning promotes the segregation of uses (Daniels, et al., 1995).

A second issue involved in small town zoning is timing. Zoning gives little power to resolve conflicts which exist prior to its inception. Small towns have been known to enact zoning policy as a reaction to undesirable development within the community (such as a new single-family homeowner adjacent to an industrial use or farm) which the city could not control. Zoning, though, can prevent land use problems from becoming worse. Likewise, zoning is beneficial in giving local government more control over new growth within the community (Daniels, et al., 1995).

Subdivision Regulations

Subdivision regulations, like zoning, are a common tool for the implementation of planning policy. Subdivision (or platting) is the legal process of dividing larger units of land into smaller units (lots) for future development or to sell. The actual subdivision ordinance outlines the local government’s rules for dividing property and sets forth requirements for services and amenities which must be provided before construction begins or before the subdivider may sell the property. The major underlying goal of subdivision regulations is the provision of efficient infrastructure, and therefore should be rooted in policy set forth by the comprehensive plan (Daniels, et al., 1995).

From the perspective of the community, the subdivision ordinance as a tool for regulating development has the ability to address several planning concerns. One such concern is the permanent nature of development resulting from subdivided property. Once an area is platted and developed, the character has been determined for that area for a long period of time. In other
words, the cost of changing an area which has already been developed is extremely costly, and due to this cost is nearly impossible. Whether the subdivider realizes it at the time or not, the plat and ensuing development in an area shapes the future of not only the land included in the plat, but also all areas around it. Thus, this reiterates the suggestion that the subdivision (and zoning) ordinance must be connected to the long term plan for the community.

The second concern is the provision of future services by the community. As time has passed, additional services have been demanded of local government. When new development occurs, the city will be expected to extend services to that new subdivision. The subdivision process allows the local government the opportunity to consider city services which need to be included in the new area. Depending on the size and location of the subdivision, the city may be expected to expand park and recreational facilities, facilitate the building of new schools, and plan for new transportation needs proportionate to the increase in population (Gitelman, et al., 2004).

The third concern addressed by subdivision regulation is safety. This is somewhat of a more specific extension of the provision of services in that it is mainly concerned with access and the area to be developed. Previous discussion may be a bit misleading in that the platting process does not only include the creation of lots for sale or development, but also includes the creation and design of circulation within the new development such as streets, bicycle/pedestrian paths, site access, and parking. Likewise, new street development must consider the provision of fire and rescue services. Thus, lot location and orientation must be reviewed as well as proximity to such infrastructure as fire hydrants. Safety concerns, however, do not simply look at automobile and emergency vehicle traffic, but also providing adequate, safe play areas for children.

Health and sanitary considerations are a fourth concern that may be addressed by subdivision policy. These types of concerns are dealt with by looking at drainage and sewage
issues that may arise from the additional development. Drainage should be assessed to decrease the amount of standing water in an area and ensure basements will not flood. Also, it should be determined whether the current sewage lines have the capacity to add additional flow and the treatment facility also has the necessary additional capacity. The same goes with the water lines the area and the pressure the new development will receive, again, an important factor in fire protection (Gitelman, et al., 2004).

The fifth major concern addressed deals with fiscal issues. From this standpoint the city must keep in mind the possible strain on the current tax base in extending facilities to the area of new development. In this sense, the city can use the subdivision process to mitigate these costs through including such things as required right-of-way and/or parkland dedications as part of the process. The same goes for requiring developers to provide additional infrastructure such as sewer and water lines throughout the newly developed area, thus decreasing the burden on the municipality. Monetary contribution requirements are called exactions, while the donation of land or facilities is termed dedication (Gitelman, et al., 2004; Daniels, et al., 1995).

The implementation and enforcement of the subdivision regulations generally falls on the shoulders of the zoning administrator. Much like zoning, however, the planning and zoning commission and the city council actually make most of the final platting decisions in (with the recommendation of professional staff). The primary method for enforcement of subdivision regulations is through the use of building permits. Building permits should not be issued to the developer until the property meets the requirements outlined by the ordinance. The administrator should also ensure that all required improvements will be properly located as agreed to in the plat. Good administration usually requires a formal form of records management for subdivisions, preferably through the use of permit tracking software. Also, as in zoning, good administration is also indicated by periodic review of the ordinance. Amendments are made through a similar process as changes in the zoning ordinance as well (Daniels, et al., 1995).
Other Regulations

Three other forms of local government planning policy which are spread along a spectrum of common use in small towns are building regulations, sign ordinances, and design guidelines. It is very common for building codes to be adopted by smaller municipalities. The enforcement of building codes by small towns, though, may be an area in which they are lacking as building inspection needs may be time-consuming and small towns may lack necessary staff. Unlike zoning or subdivision ordinances, building codes are not drafted by the city. Rather, the city typically adopts a standard code, which is occasionally specified by state requirements. Building codes typically prescribe requirements for materials and structural design, as well as standards for plumbing, electrical wiring, and fire suppression (Daniels, et al., 1995).

Sign ordinances are not as prevalent in small towns, but it is not unusual for a small town to have some form of sign regulation. A sign ordinance is a type of design review in which the city places restrictions on the size, type, and location, and materials of signage throughout the community. The rationale behind sign control is safety, as well as the preservation of aesthetics (and property values). In making decisions regarding sign ordinance, the administrator and decision makers should seek and utilize information from local business owners in order to create more politically acceptable regulations (Daniels, et al., 1995).

The final form of planning policy involves the use of design regulations. Possibly the aspect of a small town with which many people identify is its aesthetic image. Small towns are generally thought of in terms of tree-lined streets with sidewalks, pedestrian friendly downtown business districts with early twentieth century brick architecture, and slow casual vehicular traffic. However, many small towns have no such formal policy in place to preserve and promote this image. A typical design ordinance focuses on protecting the community from development that would detract from this image. Sometimes these regulations are built in as part
of the zoning ordinance, while another option would be for a separate design ordinance. In the case of a separate design ordinance the city should appoint a design review board to examine architectural plans for proposed new development, and alterations to current development, especially in historic districts. In most small towns, though, the planning commission may double as the design review board, commonly working with advice from a community architect. Court rulings, however, give communities a fair amount of warning in terms of creating design ordinances. Design ordinances should be void of vagueness, meaning that they should be written in such a way as to prevent arbitrary decisions by the decision makers (Daniels, et al., 1995; Scheer and Preiser, 1994).

**Small Town Planning Issues**

In order to better understand the context in which planning is conducted in a small town, this section will touch on planning-related issues with which small towns are typically concerned. First, this section will discuss the problem of Midwestern small town economic development. Second, this portion will look at the more specific economic issue of small town downtown deterioration. The third issue discussed will be the problems accompanying exurban development, an issue the towns included in this study may have to face in the not-so-distant future. However, within these broader headings, several related issues will be very briefly highlighted, including smokestack chasing and reliance on the “old economy,” a specialized labor force, lack of management capacity, demand for inefficient development, loss of local retail and manufacturing translating to less local government tax income, and reliance on sources outside of the city government for planning functions.
Economic Development

One of the major planning issues for small towns is economic development. Small town economic goals typically focus on the development of a growing and broad tax base (Daniels et al., 1995). The small town focus on economic development is especially evident in the Midwest, and even more specifically in Iowa. Until the 1980s, the economies of rural Midwestern areas focused on supplying raw materials and agriculture products to urban areas for processing and distribution. Since then, however, rural Iowa has focused on expanding its economic base through the recruitment of low-tech “old economy” manufacturing jobs, mail order business, or other employers such as casinos or prisons. This policy may be referred to as “smoke stack chasing.” This policy is typically characterized by the theory that, regardless of the type of industry, any job recruitment will revitalize a community. However, smoke stack chasing can be a large gamble by a community (Mattson, 2003). Often the community will offer substantial tax incentives and bears a large burden of the necessary infrastructure improvements in return for the relatively low-wage jobs that will be provided by the industry. Theoretically, this would in turn create commercial job spin-offs, an idea that may or may not come to fruition. To put it more plainly, small towns participating in smoke stack chasing often end up trading scarce tax dollars for short term gain. More troubling for Iowa’s small towns is that it has been found that footloose firms based outside Iowa are more likely to close down factories in small town Iowa when facing economic pressures (Mattson, 2003).

Several reasons are given for why small towns end up pursuing the risky policy of smoke stack chasing. The primary reason given is that government development capacity is simply insufficient. The political skill base and will in small rural communities are generally insufficient when compared to larger communities with larger governments, and are usually lacking in terms of managerial and organizational capacity. Likewise, the small scale of the
local government makes implementation of large economic development projects impractical. Large scale economic development projects generally require an array of administrative skills and other personnel for aspects such as grant writing, acquisition, information systems, and financial management (McGuire, Rubin, Agranoff, and Richards, 1994).

So what might be considered “good” economic development? The authors of the Small Town Planning Handbook, Thomas Daniels, John Keller, and Mark Lapping (1995), identify six primary ingredients which they deemed important for successful economic development. First the community should focus efforts around local resources, including location, current businesses and financial institutions, and citizens in general. Second, the city should place an emphasis on comprehensive planning in order to better guide any anticipated growth. Third, leadership must exist outside the local government. Community leaders and the general public must be committed in order to sustain development efforts. Fourth, job training along with utilizing any educational institutions in the area are helpful to the recruitment and preservation of economic development. Fifth, the authors suggest that the local government unit should play a key role in actively seeking federal and state grants, as well as making the link between the grant funding and the needs identified within the comprehensive planning process. Finally, the local government must allow for a certain amount of creativity within the economic development planning process, and able to manage opportunities for successes that may not have been expected (Daniels, et al., 1995).

Concerns with Exurban Small Towns

Some of the cities selected for this study fall within the category of being urban-adjacent, and thus may be prone to the issues that accompany exurban development. Exurban development forms as a result of the trend of counterurbanization, or the movement from central cities to suburbs or nearby rural communities (Davis, Nelson, and Dueker, 1994). This outward
movement from larger urban areas is caused by several forces, such as the view that rural areas are an ideal place to live, generally offer lower property taxes, greater residential choice, lower housing costs, outward movement of jobs, and transit times that are comparable to urban/suburban living. This potential population increase in small towns located in close proximity to urban areas is a major concern to that rural community’s local government. Exurban development often means the increase in demand for transportation infrastructure, public services, and community facilities (Davis, et al., 1994).

The issue with small town exurban development is that the local government often lacks the capacity to handle such demands. Small towns often cannot afford professional planning staff, but rather utilize other entities such as a regional council of governments, the state land-grant university, or the state department of commerce or community affairs to assist with long term planning needs. The lack of planning staff, however, usually translates into implementation problems (Daniels, et al., 1995). This lack of capacity to implement the comprehensive plan can often be very costly to the community. Often small town exurban development results in lower densities. One study by Judy Davis, Arthur Nelson, and Kenneth Dueker (1994) has shown that eighty-five percent of exurban home buyers purchase lots of at least one acre with over one-third buying lots in excess of five acres. This expansive low-density development not only costs the city in terms of inefficient infrastructure design, but also cuts into land that can be used for its natural resources. Few exurbanites that desire large lots desire to use that land for farm or forestry purposes, a major issue for a state such as Iowa that is highly dependent on farming as an industry and places an emphasis on farmland protection (Davis, et al., 1994).
Indicators of “Good” Small Town Planning

In order to assess small town planning, it is necessary to first establish criteria on which the quality of planning might be judged. Principles of “good” planning can be very difficult to pinpoint because they often reflect personal values. Thus, a definition of good planning differs significantly between authors, not to mention individual citizens in each community. However, there appear to be at least some requirements of actual planning policy on which most will agree. This section will outline requirements for good planning policy in three sections. The first set of requirements will be a set of requirements of planning policy taken from the previous sections of this literature review. Next, this section will discuss key evaluation criteria of one of the primary indicators of a community’s planning policy, the comprehensive plan, per an article written by William Baer (1997).

Basic Implementation of Planning Policies

Several indicators of good planning policy may be taken from the review of literature in this chapter. It should be noted, though, that the term “good planning policy” in this case is a relative term, and actually represents the minimum requirements that should be included. However, it may be argued that since the communities in this study may lack expertise in planning, meeting these requirements may be considered good planning practice. The first of these basic requirements looks at the staff communication to decision makers, as well as the comprehensive plan. As determined by the section on the role of the planner, good planning practice may be exhibited by the policy research and the identification and communication of alternatives to the elected officials. The converse of this would be to make a single recommendation with little justification. Second, good planning should exhibit an attempt at involving the community in the planning and decision making process, a sentiment expressed in
both the role of the administrator as well as the role of the planner. This also may be difficult in a small town setting due the lack of government capacity, discussed in the section on small town planning issues. Third, current and mid-range planning policy, such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and the capital improvements program, should assist in the implementation of the goals and recommendations outlined in the comprehensive plan. This interconnectedness of policy is often absent as many communities adopt comprehensive plans for the reasons of federal requirements for funding or state mandates (Baer, 1997).

Next, all planning policy, long term and current, needs to be evaluated on a regular basis. Again, this is another area that may be neglected due to the lack of local resources and the time consuming nature of the process. Also, as stated in the section on other planning policies, the existence of other planning regulations, such as a sign ordinance or design regulations (even at a minimum level), may show a community’s intent to practice good planning. Next is the question of who is actually conducting the planning functions for the city. In many cases, small town planning may be done through local councils of governments, the county government, or other regional planning agencies. In this sense, the individuals conducting planning functions may not have close ties to the community in which the planning is conducted. However, this often allows the city to access additional resources and expertise at a lower cost. Finally, the planning regulations of the city, especially the most basic ordinances such as building codes or zoning, must be consistently enforced (Anderson, 1995; Baer, 1997).

Comprehensive Plan Evaluation Criteria

All local planning regulation should have a firm foundation in the comprehensive plan. This arguably makes the plan one of the major underlying determinants in the quality of planning in any community. Thus, added emphasis should be placed on the evaluation of the
William Baer (1997) outlined a number of criteria by which a comprehensive plan should be evaluated. These criteria fall within eight major headings: adequacy of context, “rational model” considerations, procedural validity, adequacy of scope, guidance for implementation, approach, data, and methodology, quality of communication, and plan format.

First is the question of adequacy of context. Baer recommended for the comprehensive plan to be evaluated on the basis of information included, such as background information provided, a clear statement of purpose, a discussion on the political and legal context, and the scope of the plan. “Rational model” considerations evaluate such aspects as providing alternatives, listing possible tradeoffs, an analysis of the infrastructure and organizational capacities, and overall problem identification. Under procedural validity, Baer requires a discussion on the formulation of the plan, including the identification of primary stakeholders and models used. Next, “adequacy of scope” suggests that the plan address issues of efficiency, equity, and predictability, as well as the benefits and costs of the chosen planning policies. The guidance for implementation section suggests that the plan include prioritization of implementation (including time frames), a schedule for plan review, and the identification of the person or agency responsible for implementation or review. The approach, data, and methodology criteria focus on the spectrum of data used, plan flexibility, and methodology. “Quality of communication” calls into question the identification of the audience and client of the document, the rationale behind the selection of particular alternatives, and linkages between proposals and goals/objectives. Finally, Baer calls for the readability and navigability of the plan (Baer, 1997).

In addition to comprehensive planning elements suggested by Baer, Stuart Meck, (2002) in association with the AICP, suggests elements of a comprehensive plan that should be required by state governments. These are generally divided into two types of elements, those that are
required, and those that are optional. There are generally six chapters that the document suggests should be mandatory in a comprehensive plan. The first suggested chapter is one that looks at issues and opportunities. Within this chapter, it is suggested that there should be a section which gives a background and perspective, a vision statement of the community, which somehow documents the core values of the community. Second, the document should have a chapter on land use. This should include both a map and associated text, and the physical area and content of the map and text should be comprehensive. Third, there should be a chapter on transportation, which includes information on all pertinent modes of transportation as well as an approach to ensure access for those that are disadvantaged. Fourth, there should be a chapter on community facilities and telecommunication. This chapter should project needs for future service delivery and future needs for parks and recreation. Next, there should be a housing component. This component should at a minimum document present conditions, project future needs, describe barriers in achieving future projected needs, and programs to assist in housing goals. Finally, the plan should include a chapter on implementation. This final chapter should include a list of long-range actions for the community, as well as a timeframe by which actions should take place.

The optional chapters in Meck’s document include economic development, and critical areas and natural hazards. The economic development chapter should relate any development initiatives to the comparative advantage they may provide, as well as define the role of government in economic development and include supportive studies. The critical areas/natural hazards section should identify areas of concern, include definitions of critical areas or natural hazards, and include a process of mitigation where feasible (Meck, 2002).
Code of Iowa

Another key source in understanding the basics of planning in Iowa is through the Iowa Code. The foundation for planning and zoning in the Code of Iowa (2006) is established in section 414.1 stating that: “for the purpose of promoting the health, safety, morals, or the general welfare of the community… any city is hereby empowered to regulate and restrict the height, number of stories, and size of buildings and other structures, percentage of lot that may be occupied, the size of yards, courts, and other open spaces, the density of population, and the location and use of buildings, structures, and land for trade, industry, residence or other purposes.” Furthermore, Section 414.3 states that these regulations must be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan. The Code of Iowa also establishes the “zoning commission” in section 414.6 as a body designed to hold public hearings, recommend boundaries of various districts, and recommend amendments, changes, or modifications to other land use regulations within each city or county. Finally, in regard to public hearings, the code outlines that the passing of any change in zoning ordinance, change in district boundaries, or change in parcel boundaries requires a minimum of one public hearing (Code of Iowa, 2006).

Utilization of Available Resources and Expertise

One of the underlying issues with conducting planning in a small community as an administrator is the lack of planning expertise, as well as the resources to hire a full-time planner on staff. Thus, an indication of small town planning may be that the community utilizes resources outside the city in order to conduct some planning functions. Furthermore, a review of literature on the matter indicates that small towns can often conduct planning activities without hiring a professional planner on staff. One such resource that is often available to small communities is a Council of Governments (or COG). These COGs are often regional in nature,
but can offer a range of assistance in community planning. This can range from providing assistance in drafting ordinances, assisting in regional collaboration on planning issues, or even assisting a city in writing its comprehensive plan (Becker, Bradbury, and May, 1991; Daniels, et al., 1995). More specifically to Iowa, Councils of Governments were established by Section 28H.1 of the Code of Iowa (2006) and (in Section 28H.3) are charged with the duties of providing planning services or technical assistance to a defined region, coordinating regional community development, coordinating the delivery of community development programs with local, state and federal programs, and preparing regional development plans that are to updated annually.

Likewise, there are other similar options for cities in Iowa that do not require additional full-time city staff. The first is utilization of current legal counsel. Not only is it important for any community to utilize a city attorney in drafting any city ordinance, but legal counsel can often direct staff to a standard ordinance that pertains to a particular planning issue. However, cities should be cautioned that attorneys are not planners; but they can help minimize the possibility of costly legal action against the city in the future. A second, and potentially more feasible option, is to utilize private planning consultants. Many times, a city will already have a consulting contract for engineering services as necessary with a private firm. It is now becoming more commonplace for such firms to also include planning services as a part of their business model. Thus, without a significant amount of extra effort, it may be possible to contract with a firm that also offers planning services on an on-call basis (Daniels, et al., 1995; Fordham, 1990).

In this review of literature, there are two primary areas of information that will resonate through the remainder of this document. The first is that the roles of the city manager or administrator, over time, can be grouped into two overarching categories. The first of these categories would be “the traditional administrator,” embodied by the roles of technical advisor, policy implementer, and political liaison, which aligns well with basic principal-agent theory.
The second category of “the contemporary administrator,” on the other hand, appears to align somewhat with the roles of the planner and includes such roles as policy innovator, broker of power, and consensus builder.

Likewise, this chapter began to describe ways by which planning may be judged in communities. This includes a review of the comprehensive plan for content, relationships that must occur between planning policies, the active involvement of the public, and providing alternatives to city decision makers regarding planning policies. The next chapter of this document, the methodology of this study, will describe how these pieces of information can be incorporated to better determine the existence of a relationship between the role of the administrator and the level of planning in a particular community.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The appropriate methodology for studying the role of the small town manager in planning in the context of the questions posed is a qualitative research design. This chapter begins with a general discussion of qualitative research. This will be followed by the more specific forms of data collection used in this study, case study research through personal in-depth interviewing as well as a review of documentation. Each section will include specifics about the cases selected, questions asked and the criteria on which the answers are judged, and the documents which were reviewed. Also included in the discussion are the advantages and disadvantages of the methods selected.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is the major underlying form of methodology used in this study. Qualitative research is designed to take place in a natural setting. Thus, it is common for the researcher to go to the site of the study in order to gain a higher level of detail about the subject of the study. It is also suggested that qualitative research use multiple methods for data collection that are more interactive, and traditionally based on open-ended observations. However, at the same time, the researcher must also ensure as little disturbance and involvement as possible in order to gain a more accurate perception of the occurrence being studied.

Qualitative research is often described as emergent, rather than tight and predefined. This allows the researcher to make adjustments to the study if necessary in light of new information or a change in perception, including the possibility of changing the research questions. Likewise, qualitative research is imperative in nature, meaning that it relies on the researcher to interpret the data. Due to the imperative nature, it is often suggested that qualitative research adopt more than one strategy of inquiry in order to increase the validity of the study through looking at the
data through a variety of lenses (Creswell, 2003). Thus, this thesis research studying the role of the administrator in planning will utilize interviews, surveys, and reviews of documentation as will be discussed in this chapter.

Case Study Research

The primary data collection strategy for this research is case studies. Case studies are typically reserved to answer “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 1994), to better explain a phenomenon. Furthermore, case study research requires no control over the behavior which is to be examined. The study essentially focuses on events or phenomenon, such as the role of a city manager/administrator, as they occur in a “natural” setting, which in this study is represented by small Iowa municipalities (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, this study utilizes a multiple case study design. Evidence from multiple case studies is often more compelling and more robust to the reader, increasing the validity of the study (Yin, 1994). Thus, it is important for each case to be selected with a specific purpose in mind and almost treated as individual experiments. In this study, cases were selected based on similarities, in an attempt to follow replication logic rather than sampling logic; however, special attention was paid so that the cases chosen also provide enough variation to allow for comparison (Yin, 1994).

There are some issues, however, of which the researcher must be aware when conducting case study research. First, many times the case investigator allows personal views or biases to enter into the findings and conclusions of the research. In this case, the researcher had to recognize two primary issues where bias could enter into the equation. The first is the small town background of the researcher, which may bring with it certain preconceptions of the cases being studied. Second, the majority of the researcher’s education has focused on the planning discipline. Therefore, special awareness was required regarding the possible biases which may
be created by background and/or education. In an attempt to counteract any possible bias, this research utilized a case study protocol which will be described briefly in this chapter.

A second major issue is that the use of case studies typically causes concern in terms of external validity. In other words, it is often difficult to scientifically generalize the results to other similar cases. For instance, twenty-six Iowa municipalities match the criteria for this study, and thus presumably represent the total “population” of this study. All of these cases were studied through a survey instrument that targeted city administrators. However, five out of these twenty-six cities were selected for additional study through in depth interviews. Thus, these cases provide more detailed data to better study the phenomenon. The issue when conducting case studies, however, is that the possibility exists that the five cases studied may not be completely representative of the twenty-six total cases that matched the study criteria. Likewise, this especially holds true for cities matching the given criteria which are located outside of Iowa.

Finally, the third major critique of case study research is that they are often time consuming, and it is difficult to determine when to end the research. Thus, the researcher must plan for the study and follow set guidelines as much as possible. These guidelines will be provided in the form of a case study protocol that will be described in more detail in this chapter (Yin, 1994).

Cases

The overarching unit of analysis for this research is the Iowa municipality which exhibits the following three characteristics determined by the *Inventory of Local Land-Use Planning in Iowa*, a survey conducted by the Institute for Design Research and Outreach (IDRO), the Department of Community and Regional Planning, and University Extension at Iowa State University (Borich, Huntington, Mahayni, Ladjahasan, and Mohd-Radzi, 2000):

1. The city has a comprehensive plan;
2. The city administrator/manager acts as the zoning administrator; and
3. The city has no other planning staff.

The rationale behind these criteria is that the cities studied should possess two major features. First, the city conducts planning functions through the use of a comprehensive plan. Second, the city manager/administrator is directly responsible for city planning due to the lack of planning staff. Twenty-six cities were found in Iowa which match these criteria, and the list can be found in Appendix A of this document.

When using a design using multiple case studies, four to six cases are recommended to allow for a higher degree of certainty. Of the twenty-six which matched the criteria (Borich, et al., 2000), five were selected as cases for this study to be representative of the other cities in the study, while still retaining some feasibility in regards to the time constraints of the research (Yin, 1994).

Case Selection via Survey Questionnaire

The selection of cases was accomplished through a survey which was sent to the administrators of all twenty-six cities matching the criteria in May 2005. Participating administrators were given approximately one month to return the completed survey instrument. Approximately two weeks from the original mailing ten individuals had responded, and a hand-written postcard was send to those communities that had not yet responded asking for their participation. Five additional surveys were mailed as a response to this mailing within two weeks. Surveys are commonly used in case study research as a convenient method of making inferences about a particular group. However, this relies heavily on the accuracy of measurement as well as the ability of the subjects to accurately portray the information the survey intends to gather. Although some generalization could possibly be made regarding the
cities fitting the case study criteria, generalization is not the primary purpose of conducting this survey. Rather, the survey was designed to determine variation between subject cities in order to select cities for further inquiry via interviews with city administrators (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The survey questionnaire consisted of seven primary sections: general information (background), education of the administrator, relationship of planning policies to the comprehensive plan, level of county planning, sources for developing planning policy, roles in changing planning policy, and perceived roles of the administrator. Again, of the twenty-six administrators that received surveys, fifteen were returned within one month of receiving the original mailing. A full version of the survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix B of this document.

*General Information*

The general information portion of the survey looked at the title of the individual surveyed as well as the form of government in the community. The possible responses for this question included “manager,” “administrator,” or “other” where the respondent could fill in a response. Of the fifteen individuals surveyed, thirteen, or eighty-seven percent, hold the title of administrator. The remaining two hold the title of manager. Also, thirteen of the fourteen (ninety-three percent), responding administrators/managers stated that the city with which they were employed had a mayor-council form of government rather than a council-manager form, meaning that an elected mayor was technically (by statute) responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. In these cases, the mayor was responsible for oversight of the administrator or manager (Code of Iowa, 2006).
Education

Regarding education, the use of an open-ended question unexpectedly elicited a wide range of responses. This made it difficult to quantify results; however, it was determined that at least eight of the fifteen (fifty-three percent) hold masters degrees. At least seven of those eight hold a master in public administration/affairs. At least four administrators (twenty-seven percent) hold a bachelors degree; while one respondent held an associates degree. The degree held by the remaining two respondents is undetermined. Forty-seven percent of respondents (seven of fifteen) claimed to have taken some form of planning education while pursuing his/her degree with two being the average number of planning classes taken. However, thirteen of the fifteen (eighty-seven percent) responded that they had pursued other forms of planning education, such as conferences, seminars, and workshops. Results of this section are displayed in Table 3.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Recent Degree</th>
<th>Planning Ed</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Other Planning Ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon</td>
<td>Phys Ed/Rec</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilton</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anamosa</td>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorah</td>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld A</td>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld B</td>
<td>BS Econ</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawarden</td>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld C</td>
<td>MPAffairs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Asoc Business</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Point</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huxley</td>
<td>BA Business</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinton</td>
<td>MSPA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull</td>
<td>BS</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean 2.4
Median 2

Cases Selected for Interviews in Bold

Relationship of Planning Policies to the Comprehensive Plan
In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to rate the relationship between the comprehensive plan and four policies which are used to implement the comprehensive plan (zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, the capital improvements program, and sign ordinance). Each of the four policies or ordinances was identified in the review of literature as typical forms of planning regulation within a community. In each case, the administrator/manager was asked to rate the strength of relationship to the comprehensive plan on a scale of one to five with one representing a “weak relationship” and five representing a “strong relationship.” The results of this section are shown in Table 3.2 below. On average, the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations had a strong relationship to the comprehensive plan with medians of four out of a possible five (mean of just over four). In the case of the zoning ordinance, thirteen of the fifteen (eighty-seven percent) rated the relationship as a four or higher. Likewise, eleven of the fourteen (seventy-nine percent) respondents to the question regarding the subdivision regulations score the relationship a four or higher with the remaining three respondents giving a score of three.

The median score for the CIP’s and sign ordinance’s relationship to the comprehensive plan were noticeably lower with median scores of three out of five. In regards to the CIP, five (thirty-three percent) respondents attributed a score of four or higher, five (thirty-three percent) responded with a score of three, and five (thirty-three percent) responded with a score of two. The sign ordinance received similar results with four administrators/managers responding with a score of four or higher, four participants responding with a score of three, and four responding with a score of two or less for thirty-three percent apiece. Thus, the responding city administrators/managers for the cities in question believe the zoning and subdivision regulations relate highly to the comprehensive plan while the CIP and sign ordinance received a mixed reaction. Nine of the fifteen (sixty percent) respondents indicated that his/her city has updated that city’s comprehensive plan in the past ten years.
Table 3.2: Relationship Between Policy and Comp. Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Zoning Ord</th>
<th>Subdiv Regs</th>
<th>CIP</th>
<th>Sign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilton</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anamosa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorah</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawarden</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withheld C</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Point</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huxley</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinton</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glidden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases Selected for Interviews in Bold

County Planning

Administrators were also asked to rate on a scale of one to five the strength of county planning for the county in which his/her city resides, with a score of one signifying “weak” county planning, three signifying “adequate” planning, and five signifying “strong” planning. The median of the scores given by the fifteen participating city managers was only two out of five, translating as adequate to slightly less than adequate county planning overall. However, eight administrators (fifty-three percent) responded with a score of one or two, signifying less than adequate county planning, while just four (twenty-seven percent) respondents assigned a rating of four or five, signifying county planning that was more than adequate. The results of this portion of the survey can be found in Table 3.3 below.
Table 3.3: Adequacy of County Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>County Planning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon</td>
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<td>Wilton</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anamosa</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Point</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorah</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huxley</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinton</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld B</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawarden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld C</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glidden</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avg: 2.7
Median: 2

Cases Selected for Interviews in Bold

Sources for Developing Planning Policy

The next section of the survey asked administrators whether city staff, a council of government, a university, or a private firm was utilized in the creation of planning policy over the past ten years. These four people or groups were identified in the IDRO Inventory of Local Land-Use Planning in Iowa as the four top responses to a similar question (Borich, et al., 2000). The results of this section can be found in Table 3.4. Seventy-nine percent (eleven of fourteen) responded that city staff was utilized in the creation of policy, mostly consisting of the CIP, comprehensive plan and codes. Sixty-nine percent (nine of thirteen) responded that a COG was utilized, mostly for the creation of comprehensive plans. Fifty percent (seven of fourteen) responded that a private firm was utilized for a wide variety of policies; and, a university was only used by eighteen percent (two of eleven) of respondents for assistance in visioning. It should be noted, however, that this section received the highest amount of non-responses.
Table 3.4: Responsibility in Developing Planning Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>City Staff/Officials</th>
<th>COG</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Private Firm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilton</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>No Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anamosa</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorah</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld A</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld B</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawarden</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld C</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Point</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huxley</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glidden</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases Selected for Interviews in Bold

Roles in Changing Planning Policy

In this section, the role of the administrator and other figures in the community are assessed regarding the likelihood of initiating change in planning policy. Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of each to initiate change on a scale of one to five with one representing a “low likelihood” and five representing a “high likelihood.” Once again, the four individuals or groups addressed in the questionnaire were top responses in the 2000 IDRO survey (Borich, et al., 2000). Responses to this section can be found in Table 3.5. It was found that the manager/administrator was the most likely to initiate change in planning policy with a median score of five out of a possible five. Only one participant responded with a score below three. The next most likely group to initiate change is the elected officials with a median of four. In the case of the elected officials, nine (64 percent) gave a score of over three while only two (fourteen percent) gave a score of less than three. Citizens and developers received median scores of three.
Table 3.5: Likelihood to Initiate Change in Planning Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Elected Officials</th>
<th>Developer</th>
<th>Citizen</th>
<th>Manager/Admin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilton</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anamosa</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorah</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld A</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld B</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawarden</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld C</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>West Point</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huxley</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinton</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Hull</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Median</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases Selected for Interviews in Bold

Perceived Roles of the Administrator

The final section of the survey looked at the perceived general roles of the administrator/manager. The review of literature identified six primary roles of the administrator, which can be divided evenly between more “traditional” roles and “contemporary” roles. The traditional roles included the manager as a technical advisor, policy implementer and policy innovator (Selden, et al., 1999; Nalbandian, 1991), while contemporary roles included the manager as a political liaison (Ammons and Newell, 1989), broker of power (Nalbandian, 1991), and consensus builder (Nalbandian and Oliver, 1999; Hirt, 2004). According to the review of literature, the contemporary roles are also somewhat descriptive of the roles a planner would be expected to possess. Each was rated on a scale of one to five with one signifying a trait “inaccurately descriptive” of the respondent’s role and a five signifying a trait “accurately descriptive” of the role. For each of the two major role groups (traditional and contemporary), the scores were averaged to create a composite score for each city administrator/manager responding. Nearly every respondent identified with the traditional roles with median scores of
four (as seen in Table 3.6). However, reactions to the contemporary roles were mixed. Three of the respondents’ scores averaged less than three while two more were in the 3.0 to 4.0 range.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Tech Advisor</th>
<th>Policy Implementer</th>
<th>Policy Innovator</th>
<th>AVG TRADITIONAL ROLES</th>
<th>Political Liaison</th>
<th>Broker of Power</th>
<th>Consensus Builder</th>
<th>AVG CONTEMPORARY ROLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilton</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4.33</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorah</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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**Cases Selected for Interviews in Bold**

In-Depth Interviewing

The third primary form of case study data collection that was utilized as part of this research is the in-depth interview. In-depth interviewing is generally more conversational, following a general set of topics more than a rigorous line of questioning. Thus, this generally allows the interviewer more latitude to ascertain more information during the conversation on particular topics of interest (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). However, in research such as this where multiple cases are being studied, some degree of systemization may be necessary in order to better assure consistency. Possibly the greatest strength of in-depth interviewing is the ability for the interviewer to obtain large amounts of information relatively quickly. However, this also places some demand on the interviewer in that interviewers should possess excellent listening skills as well as skill in terms of personal interaction. The interviewer also must make certain that they do not lead the subject to certain conclusions, but rather allow for the participant’s perspective to develop as he or she views the situation discussed (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).
These interviews were conducted on two separate trips throughout Iowa. In October-November 2005, interviews with the administrators of Glidden and Hull were conducted on consecutive days. In May 2006, the administrators of Vinton, West Point, and Huxley were interviewed. A case study protocol was utilized in conducting the interviews and is outlined later in this chapter.

Elite Interviewing

For this research, the subjects interviewed were the city managers or administrators of the cities selected from survey results based the survey responses to their perceived roles. The rationality behind choosing administrators/managers as subjects is that they will most likely possess the greatest expertise on their own role within their specific case setting. However, this also creates certain constraints which need to be addressed. First, elite interviews, due to the individual’s position, may be difficult to reach in order to conduct the interview. This can be especially accurate in the case of a small town administrator due to the wide array of tasks for which he or she is responsible. This can often result in scheduling difficulties, an issue which became somewhat of a factor in this particular study.

A second issue is the fact that only one perspective is being studied, that of the administrator/manager. This allows for the opportunity for the subject to give biased information due to the fact that information will not be confirmed by another source. This is why this study attempts to check interviewee responses against city documentation to verify information. Finally, this situation assumes that the subjects will have experience at their position and that they can recall and portray information accurately (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).
Selection of Case Study Interviews

Since this study was designed to look at how the role of the administrator impacts planning, responses from the final section of the survey was utilized in determining cases for further inquiry. The area in which responses showed the greatest amount of variety between the perceived roles of administrators was found in the scores given for the contemporary roles of the administrator. Thus, five respondents that identified their willingness for further participation were chosen based on their perception of aligning with the more contemporary roles.

A multiple-case study design was chosen for its ability to provide comparisons between cases being studied. With a multiple-case design, cases can be selected for study based on certain factors, which act somewhat multiple experiments in a purely scientific study. Because of this, multiple-case study designs are generally considered as more compelling that single-case research designs (Yin, 1994). In this design, the primary variable being studied is the perceived roles of the city administrators. Two contemporary administrators, two traditional administrators, and one administrator that fell in between the two role typologies were chosen. The theory behind this is that the contemporary role typology aligns better with the roles of a planner, thus contemporary-minded administrators may exhibit a higher level of planning than their traditional-minded colleagues.

However, one of the primary concerns with a multiple-case design can be resource intensive and time consuming. In this research, multi-case design utilizing personal on-site personal interviews necessitated driving around the state of Iowa. Likewise, some trips had to be taken overnight to accommodate the availability of the administrators being interviewed. Thus, five cases were chosen because this was the minimum number of cases that would provide both some similarities between administrators (two contemporary administrators, two traditional administrators, and one administrator that may end up falling into either or a mixture of the two
categories), as well as differences (such as geographic location, relative size of community, proximity to a metropolitan community, etc.) (Yin, 1994).

The administrators from the cities of Hull and Glidden, on average, exhibited a high level of agreement toward the contemporary category with average scores of over four. The administrator from Huxley responded with an average score of just over three, showing some level of indifference toward the contemporary roles; and the administrators from Vinton and West Point had scores that averaged less than three which showed a low level of agreement with the contemporary roles.

Upon a closer look, this group of five participants also displayed differences in other areas of the survey as well. Two of the three (more particularly the two administrators that aligned most with contemporary roles) noted some form of planning education, which was also somewhat representative of the group that participated in the interviews. Also, three of the five noted updated comprehensive plans in the past ten years; and the respondents showed a variety scores in regard to the likelihood to initiate change planning policy. Finally, the five selected administrators were spread somewhat evenly across Iowa geographically. Thus, the five cases selected showed a variety of scores from survey results, appeared to be representative of the sample, and varied in terms of geographic location.

Interview Line of Inquiry

The interviews followed a line of inquiry which focused on the role of the administrator and its impact on planning policy. Along with the effect of the manager’s role, the interview questions also pursued information that would be helpful in determining the quality of planning in the community, as well as other possible factors which could influence Iowa’s small town
planning. A full line of inquiry along with a matrix by which responses were judged are found in Appendixes A and B of this document respectively.

Overall, three major topics comprise the line of inquiry. The first set of questions looks directly at the role of the administrator, and asks the participant directly about their roles and attempts to confirm or deny the data collected in the survey. The second set of questions utilizes the review of literature in an attempt to determine the quality of planning in small towns. As stated earlier, a premise for this study is that the administrator is primarily responsible for planning functions in the city with which they are employed. However, it was also determined that it may be in the best interest of small communities to utilize outside expertise such as a COG or county planners (Becker, et al., 1991). Therefore, the first question of this section looks at verifying the source of planning for the city.

Next, this section inquires about the comprehensive plan. It was determined that all planning implementation policy should derive from the comprehensive plan and that the comprehensive plan should have mandatory review (Meck, 2002; Daniels, et. al., 1995). Therefore, the third set of questions looks at the overall reliance of the city on its comprehensive plan as well as any review mechanisms the city may have in place. This is followed by question four, which looks at how the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and CIP relate to the comprehensive plan. Question five, looks at the process of changing zoning or subdivision policies. Good planning policy in terms of changing policy would include such things as periodic review, legal advice, and public involvement (Anderson, 1995; Daniels, et. al., 1995; Meck, 2002). Question six inquires about the CIP development process. According to the literature review, the CIP process should also involve a number of stakeholders, including the planning commission to ensure implementation of the comprehensive plan and other governmental units (Bowyer, 1993; Tigue, 1996). Finally, in terms of policy development,
question seven asks about the presentation of alternatives during a change in planning policy (Anderson, 1995).

The next two questions eight and nine, looks at current planning issues not covered by the previous section. Question eight asks about the implementation of subdivision regulations, and specifically who is responsible for paying for and installing infrastructure for new development. In this case, the requirement of a developer to pay for new infrastructure on a proposed development may represent good planning (Anderson, 1995). Question nine asks about consistency in enforcing the current zoning ordinance by asking about non-conforming cases. Fewer non-conforming cases may indicate some level of consistency in enforcing the ordinance, with consistency translating to good planning (Daniels, et. al., 1995). This question also goes on to discuss other factors which may influence the way zoning is administered.

Finally, the fourth section of the line of inquiry, directly addresses the topic of this thesis. Question ten inquires about what the administrator feels are key factors influencing the way planning is conducted in his or her community, while question eleven asks the administrator about the extent his or her roles influence planning in the community.

Review of Documentation

A third form of data collection for this study is a review of documentation. One of the advantages of conducting a review of documentation is that it is likely to be relevant to any form of case study. Documentation is generally used to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources. Documents can provide other specific details that may not be covered in interviews, as well as identify evidence which may be contrary to the information collected via interviews. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the review of documentation supplements data collected from in-depth interviews with city administrators, as well as an independent means of data collection.
However, it should be noted that the usefulness in reviewing documentation is not based on a lack of bias. Documents do not necessarily represent a literal recording of events. For instance, in the case of this research, the fact that a statement of city policy exists within a comprehensive plan or ordinance does not necessarily translate into implementation or enforcement. Likewise, it should be kept in mind that each document is written in a specific context for a specific audience. Thus, the researcher should not attempt to make assumptions outside of these two aspects. This also demonstrates another primary concern of this form of data collection. Researchers must also be warned of the potential for over reliance on documents as a portion of case study research, just as there is the potential for over reliance on interviews. This research, again, attempts to use the review of documentation coupled with the use of in-depth elite interviewing primarily as a means of triangulation. In other words, several different forms of data collection from different sources help strengthen the research by providing information that can be compared for accuracy and validity (Yin, 1994).

Documents Reviewed

The primary document to be reviewed was the comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan, as the major overarching piece of planning policy in the community, was reviewed in three aspects. Primarily, the plan was reviewed to search for elements of good planning policy. These criteria, found in Appendix C, begins by looking at specific information that should be included in a comprehensive plan. According to the Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook (Meck, 2002), comprehensive plans should have required chapters on issues and opportunities, land use, transportation, community facilities, housing, and implementation that would provide for maintaining orderly development per the Code of Iowa (2006). Furthermore, optional chapters are suggested which would contain information on economic development, critical areas/natural hazards (Meck, 2002) and assessment and review of the comprehensive plan (Baer, 1997). Each
proposed chapter is then followed with a checklist of more specific content that should be included in a comprehensive plan. Secondly, the plan (when available) was to be reviewed in terms of content, in order to substantiate the results of the interviews with city managers.

Case Study Protocol

As suggested by literature on qualitative research, a case study protocol was designed and implemented as a part of this research. A case study protocol is designed to set forth standards in preparation of conducting case study research and analyzing the content and results of the study. This is important as it applies to this study for two primary reasons. First, the case study protocol is designed in such a way that the researcher is reminded of the scope of the study and has some reference point as to when the research can conclude. One of the problematic areas of qualitative research discussed earlier was that the researcher often may not know how to conclude a study as new possible lines of inquiry unfold during the course of the study. Thus, in order to combat this issue, a line of inquiry (both for interviews conducted in person, or in the form of a “script” in the event a phone interview was necessary) was created and reviewed for possible responses prior to the interview taking place. A copy of the established line of inquiry for personal interviews conducted as part of this study can be found in Appendix D of this document.

A second issue that can be neutralized through the use of a case study protocol is the collective potential biases of the researcher. As was discussed previously, researchers studying a familiar situation may bring certain biases into the process, making it difficult to review the data collected in a neutral manner. In this research, this is addressed by documents that can be found as Appendices C and E of this thesis document. These pages represent forms for the review of the comprehensive plan and the personal interviews respectively. When formulated through a
review of literature prior to conducting interviews, as was practiced in this study, the pre-existing criteria attempt to ensure that data is evaluated in a consistent and unbiased manner.

The final aspect of a case study protocol establishes the environment in which the studies are to be conducted, and ensures that the researcher is prepared for interviews. In the case of the interviews conducted as part of this research, it was suggested by the qualitative research literature that a participant is best studied in the applicable “natural” environment. For the purpose of this study, this meant going to the different communities in which the administrator was employed, and conducting the interview in the city offices. Thus, one such issue was how data was collected and analyzed. In conducting this research, notes were taken on individual sheets containing the pre-determined line of inquiry and the conversation was recorded (and erased at the conclusion of this study). Surveys were conducted in person October-November 2005, and May 2006, and review of documentation occurred on the same dates as the interviews. Prior to a visit to each city, contact was made with the participant via email or a telephone conversation, and the administrator was given the choice of the time and location of the interview as surveys were generally grouped into two interviews per day due to driving distance between locations. Data was analyzed immediately following the interview on prepared sheets of paper containing a checklist of evaluation criteria. A second issue was the availability of the administrator as well as space at the respective city halls that would be conducive to an interview environment where the administrator would experience the least amount of impact. In most cases, the interviews were conducted in the council chambers/meeting room of the small city facilities at the request of the participant so that he or she could be easily found if necessary in the event of an emergency. This necessitated some advanced planning and on multiple occasions interviews had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen events or the preferred meeting space being unavailable. Issues such as these needed to be addressed through advanced planning and a case study protocol to maximize the utility of the potential results of the study (Yin, 1994).
In review, the methodology of this research is three-fold in nature. First, city administrators fitting the survey criteria were surveyed to determine their perceptions of their roles as administrators, as well as to gauge the level of planning in their community. From these survey results, five cases were selected for case study interviews and reviews of documents (specifically the cities’ comprehensive plans). The cumulative efforts of these areas of research attempted to establish the roles of administrators in particular Iowa communities matching the study criteria, and determine the level of planning in that community so that a correlation may be found. The following chapter will discuss the case study interviews and reviews of documentation in more detail.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Interview/Review of Documentation Results

As previously stated, the primary purpose of the survey was to provide information by which in-depth interviews may be selected. The primary purpose of the study is to determine how perceived roles of small town city managers/administrators impact community planning for their respective communities. Thus, interview participants were principally selected by their agreement with the various roles of the administrator listed in the questionnaire, as well as the respondents willingness to participate in further interviews as noted on the survey questionnaire. Five participants were selected for interviews as follows:

- Two administrators/managers who felt that the listed contemporary roles accurately described his or her role in the community, signified by a score of four or higher (out of five);
- One administrator/manager who felt indifferent about the listed contemporary role in the community, signified by a score of three; and,
- Two administrators/managers who felt that the listed contemporary roles described his or her role in the community less accurately, signified by a score of lower than three (out of five).

The selected participants also represent an array of other possible factors, such as city size, location in Iowa, growth and planning education of the manager/administrator.

As stated in the methodology, the interviews focused on the roles of the small town administrator and the development of planning policy. The line of inquiry centered on the perceived relationships between the roles of the administrator, utilization of the comprehensive plan, and development of planning policy. Along with the interviews, each city’s “comprehensive plan” was also reviewed in terms of content and a brief tour of each community
was conducted (when possible). The answers and findings were then compared with the indicators of good planning outlined in the review of literature section to determine any relationship between the role of the administrator and good planning practice. The following gives a brief description of each community and reviews each of the five cases studied, beginning with those communities with administrators/managers which did not identify well with more contemporary roles of the administrator in the original survey.

Case One

“Case One” was an interview with the city manager of the largest community in the study with a year 2000 population of over 5,000. The city is a county seat, and the city had a stagnant population between 1990 and 2000, but has a nominal amount of projected growth according to the 2004 estimate (United States Bureau of the Census, 2006). The city is located in eastern Iowa and is within a forty to fifty minute commute from both Cedar Rapids and Waterloo. According to the 2000 IDRO survey, the city first adopted a comprehensive plan in the early 1970s and has had zoning since the 1950s. In the survey conducted as part of this research, the participant indicated that no planning courses were taken as part of their Master’s education, but the individual noted that they have attended planning conferences or workshops (Borich, et. al., 2000). The survey included in this research also indicated that this individual felt indifferent about the contemporary roles of the administrator on average, giving a particularly low score to the concept of an administrator as a “broker of power.” The personal interview corroborated the original indications found in the survey. The manager indicated that implementation, coordination, and managing city staff were the primary roles of the administrator. Likewise, when asked specifically regarding the more contemporary roles of the administrator, the
The administrator indicated the close-knit nature of a small community and the general opinion that smaller communities were less political than larger cities made the contemporary roles less applicable than in larger communities. When asked what the key influences determined the way the city conducted planning functions, the administrator believed that the size of the community was the primary underlying factor. Similarly, the individual noted the personal belief that the perceived roles of an administrator have little or no impact on the way small town planning is conducted (Martin, 2006).

In regard to the indicators of good planning included as part of this study, the interview yielded responses signifying less than adequate community planning. The administrator indicated that he was the individual conducting the majority of review of most land use applications, and that virtually no consultation with any other entity, including the city attorney, was typically included in the process. Even though the 2000 IDRO survey indicated that the community had a comprehensive plan, the review of documentation revealed that the city’s comprehensive plan only consisted of a land use map that had not been updated in a lengthy period of time and no formal accompanying documents. Furthermore, a review of the map and tour of the community indicated that the map was actually a current land use map, and did not differentiate current and future land uses. There was no review mechanism for determining the appropriateness of the land use map and the participant indicated that this worked well for the size of the community. Furthermore, the administrator indicated the belief that anything more than a land use map included in a typical comprehensive plan would go unused (Martin, 2006).

The manager also felt that the general nature of the current subdivision and zoning ordinances fit well for the smaller community and were not commonly reviewed or changed rather than adjusting to changing community needs or goals. Also, any change was typically reactionary to finding a particular instance not currently covered by the code. The participant noted that the low amount of conflict between the comprehensive plan and current ordinances
influenced the processes for revision. The administrator noted that they typically initiated changes in the ordinances and ordinances were either written by the participant after review of information made available by the Iowa League of Cities. However, the administrator noted few “legal non-conforming” situations in the city due to “grandfathering” some cases (Martin, 2006).

When changing ordinances and policy, the only input gathered was the public notice and hearing required by the state. Legal counsel was rarely consulted (other than receiving City Council packets); and generally only one suggestion was made as multiple options for policy generally led to confusion. The City did not have a capital improvements program aside from the yearly budget and an abbreviated process was utilized for gaining input prior to the recommendation. The participant also indicated that the city had no particular policy on public incentives for new developments (Martin, 2006).

Case Two

Case Two involved the smallest city in the study with a year 2000 population of approximately 1000. The city is located in extreme southeast Iowa. The city saw very little population change between 1990 and 2000, but has shown a declining trend by the most recent projections (United States Bureau of the Census, 2006). According to the 2000 IDRO survey, it is unknown when the city first adopted a comprehensive plan, and the community has only had zoning since the 1970s. In the survey conducted as part of this research, the participant indicated that no planning courses were taken as part of their Master’s education, but the individual noted that they have attended planning workshops conducted by the Iowa State University Extension system (Borich, et. al., 2000).

The survey included in this research also indicated that this individual felt, on average, that the more contemporary roles of an administrator did not accurately depict the roles of a
small town administrator. All three listed roles received a response of three or lower with the “broker of power” description given the lowest possible score of one. The responses given in the personal interview were very similar to the indication given by the survey results. The administrator spoke primarily about roles of reporting, implementing, and ensuring compliance. When asked to elaborate, the participant indicated that his position may focus more on the roles described because the administrator of this particular community is also the administrator of the local utility company. When asked about the more contemporary roles of the administrator, the participant felt that the contemporary roles of an administrator apply “proportionately” to the size of the community. Thus, it was felt that the contemporary roles were not without merit; however, they were generally “more important in larger cities.” When asked what the key influences on the way the city conducted planning functions, the administrator believed that the most important factor was the amount of resources a community has to dedicate to planning needs. When asked about the extent to which an administrator’s perceived roles impact planning, the administrator indicated that the perceived roles can be an important factor, but the impact is ultimately limited by the city’s resources and, in the case of this particular community, the small size of the population (White, 2006).

In regard to the indicators of good planning included as part of this study, the interview yielded responses which showed that planning lacked below minimum standards in some cases, but showed promise in others. In regard to possible indicators of adequate planning, the participant indicated that other qualified entities were consulted when certain policy decisions were made to utilize a higher level of expertise as well as promote efficiency. The city attorney worked closely with staff in policy development, and the area Council of Governments was utilized when possible. The administrator felt that it was appropriate to leverage other governmental entities for capital projects when possible. However, the review of documentation indicated that, like Case One, the only element of a comprehensive plan that existed in the
The administrator indicated that the city had a very old, defunct comprehensive plan, but could not locate it during the visit and noted as it was either filed away in a large bank of filing cabinets or thrown away. No other required comprehensive plan elements were found during the visit. The participant did not necessarily discount the usefulness of a comprehensive plan, but felt that a land use map suited the city well enough. Likewise, the land use policy was not reviewed regularly, and alternatives were not typically presented when a policy change was contemplated, to promote a “smoother process.” The city also did not have a capital improvements program and assessed capital needs on a yearly basis along with the city budget (White, 2006).

The participant did note that the general nature of the current subdivision and zoning ordinances were very general and allowed for flexibility which suited the small community well. Similar to the previous case, any change to policy seemed to be reactionary to finding cases which were not sufficiently addressed in the current code. The participant stated that the extremely low rate of growth or change factored heavily in the review of the code and land use map. When change did occur, the only input sought was the minimum required by state statues. The participant did not discuss the specific referenced statutes in detail. However, only a few non-conforming situations seemed to occur in the city, and the city did seem to have some very general policy on public-private partnerships for new developments (White, 2006).

Case Three

Case Three is the first case in the study which has seen a noticeable increase in population. This city increased from a population of just over 2,000 in 1990 to a population of over 2,300 in 2000. The city is located in Central Iowa within a forty minute commute to Des Moines and Ames (United States Bureau of the Census, 2006). According to the 2000 IDRO
survey, the city first adopted a comprehensive plan in 1970 and had last updated the document in the late 1990s. Likewise, the city adopted zoning in correspondence to the creation of the comprehensive plan in the early 1970s. The survey conducted as part of this research revealed that the manager/administrator had a background in business and had no other formal planning training other than university extension workshops (Borich, et. al., 2000).

Like Case Two, survey results indicated that this individual felt, on average, that the more contemporary roles of an administrator did not accurately depict the roles of a small town administrator. The participant gave the roles of “political liaison” and “broker of power” scores of less than three, but identified with the role of “consensus builder,” giving that item score of four. The responses given in the personal interview, however, did not completely align with the initial survey results. In regard to the question about the perceived key roles of the small town administrator, the administrator discussed the belief that roles in smaller communities were not that different from larger communities, except the manager was a little more involved in the details of the organization. When asked about the more contemporary roles of the administrator, the participant felt that the contemporary roles of an administrator do apply and apply with an equal amount of significance as many larger communities, but also occurred in a situational manner. The administrator felt that the role scenario that was depicted especially applied to growing communities (Haldeman, 2006).

When asked to identify key influences on the way the city conducted planning functions, the administrator indicated that one of the more important factors was inertia in a community’s mindset. However, the education and knowledge base of elected officials and key community stakeholders, as well as growth or the potential for growth, were also seen as important factors. When asked about the extent to which an administrator’s perceived roles impact planning, the administrator indicated the effect of perceived roles, especially the more proactive contemporary roles, depended heavily on the flexibility of the manager/administrator. Elaborating on this
concept, the participant indicated that an administrator who is very involved and proactive may have his or her effectiveness limited when attention is not given to the goals of the community (Haldeman, 2006).

In regard to the indicators of good planning included as part of this study, the interview yielded results which showed signs of positive planning. This community was the only case in the study which had a comprehensive plan which contained many of the required elements. The participant indicated that the current plan, though, was characterized as generally obsolete and was seldom used. However, recognizing this issue, the city was going through a planning process to create a new plan at the time of the interview which would better fit the community and provide information which the city may begin using on a regular basis as part of the decision-making process. A review of documentation regarding the current plan yielded that a number of the required elements were included. Of the required elements, the plan included sections on a background, visioning and public involvement, a complete map and text of current and future land uses, an inventory of housing conditions and future housing needs, a section on transportation, and a list of long-range actions for implementation. However, there was not a large amount of information on future parks and open space, an infrastructure analysis, and a timeframe for implementation. None of the optional elements (economic development, critical areas analysis, and assessment or review procedures) were included. The document did include information on the client and authoring firm, being the city and an engineering and planning firm regularly utilized by the city respectively. Thus, approximately half of the elements listed on the evaluation checklist were included (Haldeman, 2006).

The city also recently reviewed the subdivision and zoning ordinances to better fit the community’s needs and goals. The administrator noted that there was no particular periodic review mechanism for either the comprehensive plan or zoning ordinance, but said that a policy for review would probably be created when the new comprehensive plan was completed. The
participant also stated that in the process of developing the new comprehensive plan and in the
process of reviewing ordinances, several different boards and commissions within the city were
utilized as stakeholder groups in order to gain a variety of input (Haldeman, 2006).

The participant also discussed that the city utilizes an engineering and planning firm as
well as legal counsel for development review and the development of new policy. Ultimately
city staff, and more specifically the city administrator, was responsible for writing a large portion
of the policy with assistance of the city attorney, but utilized a number of sources in the process.
However, as in the previous two cases, typically one preferred option for policy was commonly
presented to the city council. When asked what factored into the relationship of current policy to
the comprehensive plan, the participant felt that the growing community and the recognized need
by city leaders were key influences (Haldeman, 2006).

This city also differed from the previous two cases in regard to the capital improvements
program. Specifically, this community had a multiple year, planned capital improvements
program. The current program did not have a strong foundation in the current comprehensive
plan; but it was noted that the new comprehensive plan should factor heavily into planning
capital projects for the community in the near future. The process for developing the capital
improvements program also exhibited signs of good planning in that various boards and
committees were typically consulted in the development of that document as well. The city also
had policies for the financing of new developments and exhibited a few cases of non-conforming
properties. However, most of the issues which reached the variance process were related to new
development and developers attempting to maximize the use of property (Haldeman, 2006).
Case Four

Case Four marks a change in terms of perceived roles that the administrator/manager exhibited in the survey. Case Four studied a city that had a 2000 population of approximately 1,600 residents, a slight increase since 1990 (United States Bureau of the Census, 2006). The city is located in rural West-central Iowa. According to the 2000 IDRO survey, it is unknown when the city first adopted a comprehensive plan in the early 1980s. In the survey conducted as part of this research, the participant indicated that they earned a master’s degree in public administration and included some form of planning education as part of that process. The administrator has also reportedly attended various planning workshops and conferences (Borich, et al., 2000).

The survey conducted as part of this research indicated that this individual, on average, identified well with the more proactive contemporary roles of an administrator. The three roles combined resulted in an average score of over four with the participant giving the highest possible score of five to the “political liaison” and “consensus builder” roles, and a score of three on the “broker of power” description (2005). The interview, however, did not necessarily verify this information. The manager indicated that the most important role of the administrator was to simply keep the city running smoothly and to minimize conflict. When asked about the more contemporary roles of the administrator, he hesitantly agreed with the descriptions and, as in other cases, questioned the relevance to smaller communities. As mentioned in previous cases, the participant talked about how a major factor in determining the way land use planning is conducted is the availability of resources a community has to dedicate to planning needs. When asked about the extent to which an administrator’s perceived roles impact planning, the administrator indicated again that the perceived roles are a factor, but was uncertain as to the extent. Rather, the respondent replied that there were a number of factors that were either more
important or equally as important, including the priorities of a community as well as the resources and more specifically the money that can be devoted to the issue (Lodge, 2005).

In this case, the response that a key role was to keep the community “running smoothly” could have translated into good planning practice, or no planning practice. In the case of the former, it could have meant that there was a high level of community involvement and a high level of consensus as to the direction of the community. However, the responses to the questions that followed ascertained that the latter was the more likely case. The responses seemed to paint a picture of low involvement, lack of clear direction, and general avoidance of conflict (Lodge, 2005).

Similar to the cases discussed previously, the comprehensive plan indicated in the IDRO survey (Borich, et al., 2000) ended up yielding a land use/zoning map for the city when documents were reviewed. Furthermore, the review of the map indicated that, similar to Cases One and Two, the land use map was primarily a current land use map. However, some future growth areas were identified on the city fringe. No other documents were found and no other required elements were included. The respondent indicated that the majority of development review and other planning functions were conducted “in house” by the administrator, but at times the city had utilized outside assistance when expertise was needed. Likewise, when policy was developed, it was typically written by the administrator and the city attorney was consulted when directed by either the planning commission or city council. The participant also felt that the city’s ordinances were written to be flexible and were effective in implementing the city’s land use map (Lodge, 2005).

In terms of policy development, the administrator indicated that the city was mostly reactionary in terms of policy development and did not have any review mechanism. Typically, the city only reviewed the city’s comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, or subdivision regulations when a conflict was noted. When asked if many non-conforming situations existed
in the community, it was noted that due to the age of the community and the timeframe in which zoning was implemented, a substantial amount of non-conforming situations continued to exist. When policy was reviewed by the city and ordinances changed, only the hearing process required by the state was followed (Lodge, 2005).

In terms of financial policies, the city had neither a capital improvements program nor a policy for funding and promoting new development within the city. It was noted that incentives were recently given to a new commercial development along a major transportation corridor and that the city would look at other similar proposals on a case by case basis. Like previous cases the capital planning occurs on a yearly basis as part of the overall budgeting process (Lodge, 2005).

When asked to identify the major factors in the implementation of the zoning map and the relationship between city policies and the comprehensive plan, the participant indicated that the community lacked the necessary resources to devote to the issue, especially since the community did not have to deal with a substantial amount of growth and change (Lodge, 2005).

Case Five

Case Five involved the city administrator of a community of approximately 2000 residents located in Northeast Iowa. The city, located virtually equidistant from Sioux City, Iowa and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, has seen notable growth since 1990 (United States Bureau of the Census, 2006). According to the 2000 IDRO survey, the city first adopted a comprehensive plan in the early 1990s; however it is unknown when the city adopted zoning. The survey included with this research indicates that the administrator has a bachelor’s degree and is currently taking graduate classes. The participant has had some form of planning
education as part of his education and has been involved in further planning education through educational seminars.

Case Five is the first case in this research where the administrator indicated that they actually identified with the more contemporary roles of the administrator than the traditional roles of the administrator. Through the interview process, this information was not immediately confirmed. In response to the question about the perceived roles of the administrator, the participant first indicated that management, implementation, delegation, and oversight were important aspects of the position. However, as the individual continued on this same answer, he spoke about some of the general concepts of the more contemporary roles of the administrator, and specifically the need for a manager to be proactive in the areas of economic development and planning and community development. When asked specifically about the contemporary roles of the administrator described in this study, the individual quickly agreed, and continued by giving the opinion that these roles are equally as important or more important for a small town administrator than an administrator with more resources. The participant emphasized this by saying that a small town today has to fight everyday and use every imaginable resource to stay alive, and in large part it is up to the administrator to put available resources together to further the goals of the community. When asked about the key influences on the way a community conducts planning, the administrator answered that resources have a lot to do with planning, but the utilization of available resources makes a major difference. Similarly, when asked whether his perceived roles influenced planning in the community, the participant said that the perceived roles of administrators can dictate the planning philosophy of the community. He felt that a more contemporary and proactive administrator would be more effective in implementing planning policies and engaging the community, but also expressed that this can be somewhat limited by the extent the governing body perceived his role as well (Feenstra, 2005).
In regard to the indicators of good planning included as part of this study, the interview yielded information which may have indicated the strongest level of planning in the study. However, this case too found discouraging information regarding the city’s comprehensive plan. Even though the 2000 IDRO survey indicated that the community had a comprehensive plan, a review of documentation indicated that the city only utilized a land use map that indicated both current and future land uses. The participant indicated that the city did have a formal comprehensive plan at one time, but that much of the information included in the document did not apply to the current situation; and thus the administrator opted not to share that information. However, as the interview continued, the administrator noted that the city had several policies that would typically be included in a comprehensive plan, but have not yet formally included in a usable document and did not produce documentation of the existence of these elements due to time constraints. Thus, the review of documentation again yielded that the land use map was the only real usable element of a comprehensive plan that existed for the community. The administrator acknowledged the importance of a strong comprehensive plan for the community and stated that the city had plans to recreate a usable document in the near future (Feenstra, 2005).

In regard to who was responsible for land use policy and implementation in the community, the administrator said that ultimately everything came across his desk. However, the participant noted that any review process was not a solitary exercise and that the city’s industrial development board, the regional council of governments, the city’s land use attorney, and other entities were consulted whenever possible. Also indicated was that the city did review policies and ordinances, including the land use map, on a yearly basis and that the aforementioned entities as well as other boards and commissions (including the Planning Commission and City Council) were highly involved in the processes. Thus, the process included more input than the basic public hearing requirement for passage of an ordinance. This,
according to the participant, resulted in an up-to-date set of goals for the community as well as applicable regulations to implement those goals (Feenstra, 2005).

When asked what factored into the utilization of a comprehensive plan, the participant indicated that a usable document must have clear goals and a high level of flexibility. The administrator continued to explain that, for small communities, it was nearly impossible to anticipate every possible source of revenue or economic program that the city could utilize in implementing the plan and goals. Thus, when coupled with uncertainty in different market forces, the ability for the document to be flexible and adaptable was a key. For this same reason, the participant stated that even the ideal small town plan cannot stay ahead of every bit of information and thus review in many cases will be reactive to some extent. The important thing, though, is to monitor the goals of the community and act accordingly, and when possible, be proactive in regard to changing policy to stay ahead of possible change (Feenstra, 2005).

When asked about the relationship of current ordinances and policies to the comprehensive plan, the participant noted that influences included recent review as well as some creativity. The individual noted that a few non-conforming situations occurred in the community. However, this was the first community in the study to mention active nuisance abatement as a reason for the success of the current ordinances (Feenstra, 2005).

Case Five also utilized a capital improvement program to implement community policies and plans. When developing the CIP, the city again utilized a number of boards and commissions, including the industrial development board and Planning Commission, in creating and adopting the policy. In this case, the city also somewhat involved the county in which it was located, for the county had some economic initiatives for small towns. Likewise, the area council of governments and a regional economic development authority were highly involved in the process, especially in pursuing state or federal grants and other fiscal programs. However, the administrator also noted that this document too needed to remain flexible as new sources of
funding become available, and that the uncertainty in funding was the key influence in the process (Feenstra, 2005).

**Summary**

In conducting case study research, it is often difficult and considered inappropriate to generalize results to the entire population. However, in a study such as this with a limited number of cases research, conclusions may at least be drawn from the situations which were studied. Likewise, results from the cases studied may assist in the continued development of planning theory on a more conceptual level. The results of “elite” interviews conducted with Iowa small town administrators yielded several consistent aspects. Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, the information collected can be useful in compiling a set of recommendations which may be useful to small town managers/administrators (Yin, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

*Opinion on the Comprehensive Plan*

None of the administrators who were interviewed had comprehensive plans which were utilized by their respective cities. However, the administrators’ opinions of the comprehensive plan appeared to coincide with the way the administrator viewed his or her professional roles. Three of the five administrators interviewed aligned themselves primarily with the traditional roles of the city manager/administrator. Those that took a more traditional approach to their role generally felt that a land use map alone was sufficient for guiding land use policy in their respective cities. Also, those that took this position also commonly cited a lack of resources and a stagnant community as some of the reasons that the comprehensive plan was not more important to their city.
The two administrators who felt the need to be more proactive with policy and development in their cities also lacked a comprehensive plan that the city used on a regular basis. One of these two cities operated with just a land use map and various comprehensive plan elements, while the other had a comprehensive plan on file, but no longer used the document. However, in these cases, the concept of having a comprehensive plan was not simply dismissed as being unnecessary as it was with the other three interview subjects. Rather, both participants noted that a comprehensive plan, when constructed as a flexible document suited to the needs and goals of the community, should be an effective policy document. In both cases, the manager/administrator also indicated that a strong economic development component should also be included in the plan. Also, the communities in which each participant was employed were either in the process of developing a new comprehensive plan or had intentions of creating a new plan in the near future. So, while none of the participants which were interviewed utilized an active comprehensive planning document, those managers/administrators who took a more contemporary view of their roles clearly acknowledged the usefulness of the document while those with a more traditional view of their roles felt there was generally not a need for a comprehensive planning document in their communities.

A larger issue, however, from the study as a whole was the administrators’ understanding of a comprehensive plan. In at least two of the case study interviews, the administrator appeared to think that the land use map was the same as a comprehensive plan, when planning literature explains that the land use map is actually just one of several components of a comprehensive or general plan. This raises an issue that was not directly addressed in this study, or previous studies on which this study is based. This study, following the lead of the 2000 IDRO research, simply asked whether the city had a comprehensive plan. All five of the administrators participating in this study indicated that their city had a comprehensive plan, when in reality it appeared that three (two contemporary administrators, and one traditional administrator) had
comprehensive plans, and the remaining two (traditional administrators) only had a land use map. Only one administrator (contemporary) had knowledge of the plan’s location and a willingness to share it. Thus many of the survey results in this study as well as the 2000 IDRO study are potentially inaccurate, and positive responses may simply indicate that the community has a land use map. Therefore, it may be prudent (in both studies) to have provided some form of a description of a comprehensive plan that differentiated it from a land use map. Overall, though, this seems to be one indicator that the level of planning in small communities is generally lacking.

Public Involvement

Through the interview process, differences appeared in the way that each community dealt with public involvement. Once again, the split in philosophy in this case also appeared to mirror the split on the perceived roles of the administrator. The three participants who identified well with the traditional roles of the administrator typically appeared to make only a minimal attempt in involving citizens in policy development and planning processes. The general thought process was that citizens needed to take the initiative to involve themselves and voice opinions on land use policy matters. This typically took place during the required public hearing for ordinance changes before the Planning Commission. Likewise, these managers/administrators felt it was rarely necessary to involve the Planning Commission in matters where their input was not required. The major factor which the participants found to dictate the necessary level of input was the low amount of conflict in the community as well as the relatively small amount of development activity and change in the community.

The two interviewed managers/administrators who identified more with the contemporary roles of a manager took a more proactive stance on community involvement. Neither of these two participants, however, noted that any extra steps were taken to involve
individual members of the public. In both cases, the cities had a number of boards and commissions which were separate from the Planning Commission and Governing Body. These other formally-organized citizen groups such as park and industrial development boards were also typically involved in the development of policy and even some development functions as stakeholder groups. Thus, by the measure of public involvement, those managers/administrators with a more contemporary view of their roles exhibited a higher level of this planning measure.

**Utilization of Available Resources**

The knowledge and use of available resources can be an important factor in assisting small town managers/administrators in conducting planning functions. As noted in the review of literature, this includes the use of regional planning agencies, such as councils of governments, as well as city attorneys or even private planning firms. It appears that the utilization of available resources also coincides somewhat with the perceived roles of administrators.

The three participants who assumed more traditional roles typically used city legal counsel as the primary resource. Two of these three participants spoke of using the city attorney in land use matters only when deemed necessary, and neither noted that they were used with any regularity. One of those two individuals stated that they did not seek out advice from legal counsel unless directed by the planning commission or governing body to do so, but noted that the city attorney usually received prepared meeting packets. The third manager/administrator noted that he worked closely with the city’s attorney on a number of matters, including any research on planning policy and with current planning activities. In terms of current planning activities, such as development review, it was also noted that most of the cities had a contracted private city engineer that could be used when necessary. However, the use of the engineer appeared to be an extremely rare occurrence. Only one of the cities mentioned utilizing the area council of governments primarily for grant-writing purposes. It should be noted that these three
managers/administrators mentioned the lack of available resources as a key factor in the way the community utilized its comprehensive plan and in the development of planning policy.

The remaining two participants who fit the more “contemporary” mindset appeared to utilize more available resources than the three “traditional” managers/administrators, but in different ways. One of these communities contracted with a nearby private engineering and planning firm to conduct development review as well as assist in some policy development when necessary. However, this participant did not indicate the regular use of an area regional planning agency. The second of the “contemporary” managers/administrators noted that the city utilized two regional planning agencies on a regular basis. The area council of governments was used for policy research and grant-writing when possible, while the city also worked closely with a regional economic development agency. This community was also fairly proactive in directing the location of new business to the community and worked with engineers on a regular basis to ensure adequate infrastructure. Likewise, engineers were also used when deemed necessary for development review purposes where concerns over utilities existed. Both of these participants claimed to work very closely with city attorneys on all policy development and through the development review process. None of the communities mentioned the use of county resources or university extension as a resource.

Utilization of a Capital Improvements Program

The final primary planning function included in this research was the use of a capital improvements program in the implementation of planning policy. This was another major defining factor between those individuals who viewed their roles traditionally and those who viewed their roles more contemporarily. Specifically, the three managers/administrators who fit the more traditional roles only utilized the yearly budget to determine any necessary capital
improvements. Conversely, the two more contemporary managers/administrators used a multi-year capital improvements program as one of the primary planning documents.

Likewise, the two city administrators who aligned more with the contemporary roles of the administrator noted growth in population, and perhaps more importantly, economic growth that they felt may be aided with the existence of a CIP. According to those managers, part of this growth could be attributed to two primary factors. First, the CIP, when associated with city policies regarding future development (although not a comprehensive plan), assisted in providing a more predictable and controlled growth in the community. Second, a multi-year document allowed for some predictability for private investors in the community. The managers interviewed noted that the organized approach by the city toward economic growth also assisted them in financing their projects. Conversely, the three administrators that were more traditional in the perception of their role saw little economic growth, but still did not feel the need for a multi-year capital financing program.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Conclusions

This study appears to have exposed more questions than answers, as is typical in many forms of qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The primary purpose of this research was to study the impact the perceived roles of the small town city manager would have on the level of planning. However, as the study concluded, and in light of the designed scope of the research, it became apparent that the methodology used did not produce adequate information by which causation could be determined between the role of the administrator and the level of community planning. Primarily due to the near nonexistence of comprehensive plans in the communities that were studied, triangulation of data could not occur. The lack of this source, as well as other potential sources that will be described later in this chapter, compromised the ability to confirm or reject other data in the study, and compromised the internal validity of the research.

Likewise, results of this study indicate that some of the research on which this study was founded may be flawed. Specifically, the IDRO survey of Iowa municipalities (Borich, et. al., 2000) was used to create the population of cities to which surveys were sent as part of this research, based on whether the city had a comprehensive plan. However, case study interview results indicate that not all small town administrators have a sufficient understanding of a comprehensive plan, and may often confuse a zoning map or land use map with a comprehensive plan. Since the research described in this document is based on the IDRO survey, the group of cities and administrators utilized in this study may be inherently flawed as each city may or may not have a true comprehensive plan. Furthermore, an accurate list of Iowa municipalities with comprehensive plans may not exist. However, this research did use the best available data at the
time, did yield some initial results that may potentially be a foundation for future research on the topic.

The primary conclusion that develops from this study is that the level of planning in the communities studied is lacking behind the standards developed by the review of literature. The most basic indicators of good planning, such as the use of the comprehensive plan, the content of the comprehensive plan, the true existence of a comprehensive plan, use of a capital improvements program, and the level of community involvement were generally substandard in the scenarios studied. It did appear that the level of planning in communities with a “contemporary” administrator was marginally better due to slightly more notable factors such as community involvement and the perceived need for a comprehensive plan. However, due to information that was not adequately produced by the methodology of this study, it cannot be confirmed that this phenomenon resulted from the role of the administrator.

Also, one major secondary correlation appeared to develop as the study progressed. The communities in the study that had contemporary administrators were not only exhibiting a slightly higher level of planning than those with traditional administrators, but the cities with contemporary administrators were also experiencing growth. This is a facet of the study that makes it difficult to draw conclusions. The research design intended to look at the role of the administrator, and its impacts on small town planning, all from the administrators’ perspectives. Thus, though this research perspective, several key factors were not studied in-depth. The fact that the cities that had contemporary administrators were growing and exhibiting more symptoms of good planning makes it extremely difficult to determine if any one factor caused the others. Were the contemporary mindset and actions of the administrator a factor that caused a slightly higher level of planning and the community growth? Or, did the growth in the community promote a higher level of planning by necessity, as well as a more contemporary-minded
administrator? This quandary indicates that the role of the administrator was not sufficiently isolated as the independent variable in this study.

Even though this study did not produce a firm conclusion in determining whether the perceived role of the administrator has a definite impact on the level of community planning in Iowa’s small towns, it is not completely without utility. Rather, the information collected and analyzed as part of this research may be an excellent foundation for further research on the given scenario. The remainder of this document will discuss further the areas of shortcoming that resulted from the methodology of this study, and propose additional lines of research that will allow for a higher level of analysis as it applies to the role of the small town administrator and its impact on planning in that community. In other words, the following sections will propose ways to fill in the blanks. The description of this research and proposed future research will be this document’s contribution to the body of literature.

Opportunities for Further Research

In the research design utilized in this study, the most significant shortcomings were that it placed too much emphasis on the opinions of the administrators, and overestimated the amount of information that could be deduced from small town planning documents. Originally, the study assumed that information found in the most basic city planning document, the comprehensive plan, might be able to assist in either confirming or rejecting statements made by the city administrators that were studied, thus providing some level of triangulation and adding validity. However, the study found that planning documents often did not even exist, and the planning documents that did exist were not commonly utilized. Thus, the documents were rendered virtually useless in increasing the validity as originally intended. As a result, this section of this final chapter will outline some additional research that may strategically fill in some of the more
significant gaps, and provide a much more accurate picture of the way small town planning is conducted as it relates to contemporary or traditional managers. However, prior to discussing the future research that could build on the data collected by this study, it is best to recognize the stronger aspects of this study, as well as those data that were collected with the right intention but produced little helpful information.

Information Collected by this Study

The first significant piece of information from this study that has some utility is the list of communities that fit the participant criteria of being a city that had an administrator, a comprehensive plan, and no planning staff per the recollection of the individual that completed the original IDRO survey (2000). This list is found in Appendix A of this document, and contains twenty-six Iowa cities. This list contains cities from the IDRO survey that indicated that they had a comprehensive plan, had no planning staff, and had an administrator or manager that was designated the zoning administrator. However, it has been noted that this list is not entirely accurate regarding the existence of a comprehensive plan. Thus, some clarification may be necessary in any follow-up research to better assess which cities actually have a comprehensive plan. With this clarification addressed in follow-up research, the list used in this study may be a useful starting point; because, presumably, those cities that indicated that they had no comprehensive plan in the IDRO survey would not have indicated so if a comprehensive plan did exist in their communities.

A second series of data collected by this study that may be used in subsequent inquiries are the opinions of the city administrators, both in the surveys and case study interviews that were conducted. Through the survey instrument, data was collected on the administrators’ opinions from fifteen of the twenty-six municipalities on how well the different community planning policies (zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and capital improvements program)
relate to the comprehensive plan. Again, once some of these documents were analyzed as part of
the case study research, it was determined that the administrators’ opinions and the planning
literature did not necessarily align. However, this still gives the researcher a base by which some
triangulation may be created for a more accurate depiction. Also, the survey instrument yielded
data regarding who generally creates planning policy. This series of questions were simple
yes/no questions on whether a group or individual created planning policy in the past ten years,
and was completed by the official in the city that would presumably know the most about that
particular area. Finally, administrators were asked in the questionnaire who they felt had the
highest likelihood of initiating change in planning policy, as well as the way different (listed)
roles of the administrator/manager applied to his or her particular position. The issue with this
data, however, is that the response given only represents the feelings and thoughts of the
administrator of that particular community, and thus would also need some triangulation to help
verify the response. This triangulation could be provided by additional opinions of individuals
that are close to the organization (such as city councilpersons, any other city staff, etc.), as well
as further documentation (job descriptions, staff reports, etc.) that would provide valuable data
that could help verify these responses.

Another series of data was collected by the survey questionnaire that may be helpful to
future research regarding education and planning background. However, due to the
questionnaire format, partial responses were given to fill-in-the-blank question formats.
Therefore, this body of data may need to be completely re-evaluated in future studies.
Specifically, administrators were asked to characterize their education, as well as the number of
planning classes in which they had participated. The wide variety of responses made the data
extremely difficult to analyze. However, these are key questions in understanding the
development administrators’ roles, as well as their perceptions of good planning policy. The
broad spectrum of responses, though, may provide some guidance on how to phrase the question in subsequent studies.

Research Opportunities

The main concern of this research was to determine the impact that the role of the administrator has on the level of planning in that particular community. Therefore, the primary data collection occurred in an attempt to determine the role of the administrator and assess the level of planning in particular communities. The level of planning, through the responses of the participating administrators and corroborated through a review of documentation (or the lack of documentation), established a low level of planning in the communities studied. This is not to say that this aspect of the study, the dependent variable, could not be studied in more detail. However, the much larger concern is isolating the independent variable, the role of the administrator to determine any possible correlation or causation in the cases studied.

The data collected in this study lays a foundation for determining the administrators’ opinions on their role, and the impact on planning. Many of the participating administrators even alluded to the belief that factors other than their own role perceptions may have as much or more to do with planning in the community. Therefore, to compliment this original study, there are four additional research approaches that could help create the additional information necessary for increased validity. These research paths include additional surveys and case study interviews with elected officials, a more extensive review of documentation, a chronological approach to the study, and a researcher observation aspect to the study. Each individual research approach, or a combination of approaches, would greatly strengthen this research (Yin, 1994).

It should be noted, however, that any of the additional inquiries discussed could be pursued as stand-alone research in certain contexts. For example, one potential study could focus on the perceived role of the governing body and its impact on planning activities; and to
some extent, that may be one pertinent portion of the extension of this study. However, it is important to stay within the general of the scope of the original research and study the impact the role of the administrator on small town planning in Iowa.

*The Role of the Governing Body*

The first line of additional research that should be pursued to add validity to this study involves additional case study research focusing on the viewpoint of elected officials. This aspect of the study would be significant in that it would provide additional information regarding the perceived role of the administrator from the perspective of decision makers in the community. The importance of the role of the governing body in this study stems from the fact that it is this body to which the administrator is directly responsible. Likewise, depending on each city’s charter, the governing body or mayor typically has the responsibility of acting as the hiring agent for the administrative position (Feenstra, 2005; Haldeman, 2006). Thus, there is the potential that the role of the administrator may stem from the opinions of elected officials, and the governing body may expressly hire an administrator with certain role perceptions. To align best with the data that has already been collected, it is proposed that this process would mimic the methodology of the administrator research.

The amended research methodology as it applies to the governing body would first include a survey, followed by in-depth personal interviews (if possible in the same fashion as the methodology for administrators). The survey should include questions five, six, eight, and a variation of question nine that were included in the questionnaire to city administrators (found in Appendix B of this document). Question five asked respondents to rate the relationship of certain planning policies (zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, etc.) to the city’s comprehensive plan on a scale of one to five. This, with some additional literature review (discussed later) would provide additional, presumably educated opinions than those of the
administrator on this topic. Question six asked about the strength of county planning on a scale of one to five, which could also provide additional information to compare to the response of administrator. Potentially, one of the most intriguing pieces of information collected in the proposed study could come from comparing the responses of the administrator to the opinions of the governing body to question eight in the original survey. This question asks the respondent to characterize, on a scale of one to five, the likelihood that elected officials, developers, citizens, or administrators would initiate change in planning policy in the community. Finally, question nine would be rephrased in two different ways. The two versions of this question would be as follows:

1. On a scale of 1-5, please characterize the following roles of the city manager/administrator as they best apply to your city’s current manager or administrator (1=inaccurately descriptive of his/her role, 5=accurately descriptive of his/her role):
   a. Technical Advisor
   b. Consensus Builder
   c. Policy Innovator
   d. Political Liaison
   e. Broker of Power
   f. Policy Implementer

2. On a scale of 1-5, please characterize the appropriateness of following roles of the city manager/administrator in your community (1=completely inappropriate, 5=very appropriate):
   a. Technical Advisor
   b. Consensus Builder
   c. Policy Innovator
   d. Political Liaison
   e. Broker of Power
   f. Policy Implementer.

The first form of this inquiry would provide a point of comparison with the responses of the administrator. The second form of the question could be important in that it may provide some insight into the priorities of small town city council members when they hire an administrator. Additionally, a form of the question that could be used in the place of, or in tandem with question two above would be: *On a scale of 1-5, please characterize the*
importance of the following roles when hiring a new city manager/administrator (1=not important, 5=very important).

Several questions, though, need to be added to the survey in order to determine the context of the situation in each community. The first of which is to ask the respondent to identify the city in which they are a member of the governing body. Likewise, and also similar to the administrator questionnaire, the respondent should be asked if they would voluntarily identify his or her self, and whether they would be willing to be interviewed as part of a follow-up to the questionnaire. Second, a series of questions should be used to give reference to the individual’s association with the current city administrator. This is important in determining the familiarity with the individual, as well as whether the individual was involved with the hiring of the administrator. This would include questions such as:

1. How long have you been a member of the governing body in your community?
2. How long as the current city manager/administrator been employed by your community?
3. Were you on the governing body when the current city manager/administrator was hired by the city?
4. If the response to the above question is no, where you involved in some other way with the hiring of the current city administrator/manager? If so, in what way?

Also, just as important may be the following series of questions regarding the influence of the governing body on the role of the administrator and vice versa:

1. On a scale of 1-5, how large of an influence do you feel the priorities of the governing body have on the roles of the city administrator in your community (1=not influential, 5=very influential)?
2. On a scale of 1-5, how large of an influence do you feel the role of the administrator impacts the actions of the governing body as it relates to city planning (1= not influential, 5=very influential)?

These questions, along with the questions regarding the roles of the administrator, should provide a more accurate picture of the role of the administrator in the community from both the
perspective of the administrator and members of the governing body, and provide a basis by which interview participants could be selected.

In selecting case study interviews from the responding members of the governing bodies, the purpose (or goals) of these interviews should first be considered. The interview should determine two things. First, the interview, when accompanied with data compiled from the administrator interviews, should better determine whether the administrator has accurately described his or her role. Second, the interviews should attempt to determine if why the administrator was hired based on the perception of his or her roles; and if so, why.

The cases for further study should be selected in a similar method as the administrator interviews were selected. First, the governing body survey returns should be sorted by city and scores shall be tabulated to determine if there is a general agreement or disagreement on the perceived roles of the current city administrator. Next, the tabulated results from the governing body questionnaires, sorted by city, should be compared to the results of the administrator questionnaires to determine if the members of the governing bodies and administrators of the same community have similar opinions on the role of the administrator. From this point, there are several options on determining the cases to select. Like the administrator case study selections, there should also be five to six different cities (rather than respondents) selected for the interviews. Ideally, they would be grouped into three communities where the governing body and the city administrator agree that the administrator exhibits contemporary roles and three communities where the members of the governing body and the administrator agree that the administrator exhibits more traditional roles; and preference should be given to those communities with council members that responded that they were involved with the hiring process of the current administrator. In reality, responses may not align as well as the scenario proposed, and there is a possibility of unequal numbers of respondents. In the latter case, cities should also be sorted by respondents and preference should also be given to cities where the
council member was involved in the hiring of the administrator as the hiring process could give insight as to why a certain administrator was selected. In regard to the former case, the following scenario regarding governing body role opinions and administrator role opinions may result:

Case 1: Governing Body = Traditional, Administrator = Traditional,
Case 2: Governing Body = Traditional, Administrator = Contemporary,
Case 3: Governing Body = Mixed, Administrator = Traditional,
Case 4: Governing Body = Mixed, Administrator = Contemporary,
Case 5: Governing Body = Contemporary, Administrator = Traditional, and
Case 6: Governing Body = Contemporary, Administrator = Temporary.

In regard to the format of the interview, several of the questions should also be similar to those that were asked of the administrators (found in Appendix D of this document). Specifically, questions one, three, four, seven, ten, eleven, and portions of question five should be amended and included in the survey of council members. These include describing the role of the administrator, gauging the use of the comprehensive plan and planning policies to implement the comprehensive plan, opinions on who proposes planning policy, opinions on whether the administrator gives the governing body options when changing planning policy, the respondent’s opinion on the key factors that influence the way the community conducts land use planning (specifically including opinions of the factors of community growth and the priorities of the governing body), and asking the respondent to gauge the impact of the administrator’s perceived roles on the way planning is conducted in the community. Again, the primary purpose of the proposed line of inquiry is to extract data that could either corroborate or contradict the responses by the administrator. Also, additional questions should be asked in the case that the individual was one of those responsible for hiring the administrator. This additional line of inquiry should include questions regarding the hiring process such as:

1. During the hiring process for the current administrator, was there any discussion regarding the preferred roles of the administrator? If so, what were the preferred roles for that position?
2. The results of the questionnaire noted that your city’s administrator/manager exhibited more traditional/contemporary roles. What were the primary factors you feel contributed to hiring an administrator that exhibited those traits?

3. Was there a particular event or circumstance that prompted the hiring of an individual with these roles?

This additional line of inquiry may provide insight into the reasons an administrator with a certain role type was chosen, as well as the timing of the hiring. This data, along with additional data in the form of some additional review of documentation may help with isolating whether it is truly the role of the administrator that impacts planning in the small communities studied.

**Review of Documentation**

A second form of data collection that may assist in determining if the role of the administrator impacts planning in Iowa’s small towns is a more intensive review of documentation. Currently, the primary document reviewed was the comprehensive plan. Additional documentation that could be reviewed for content, either to further study the level of planning (based on the predetermined criteria), or to further study the factors involved in small town planning (including the role of the administrator). These additional documents would hopefully include the job description of the administrator, the job posting at the time the administrator was hired, other planning policy documents that may exist (including zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations), staff reports for planning items, and meeting minutes from when the administrator was hired as well as meetings where planning items were discussed.

It should be noted, however, that this review of documentation should only be conducted on those communities that were used for case study interviews for the purpose of consistency, and would be judged through the same planning criteria as described in Appendices C and E. Thus, along with data collected from case study interviews with administrators, members of the governing body, and additional chronological research (discussed next), a greater degree of
triangulation and certainty should begin to form regarding whether the role of the administrator is a primary or secondary factor in determining the quality of planning in a community.

Chronological Research

A key revelation that occurred during the original research was the fact the quality of planning, the growth or decline of the community, and the level of city planning seemed to follow similar patterns. Growing communities generally had contemporary administrators and a higher level of planning, while declining communities generally had a traditional administrator and lower levels of planning. However, it is difficult to determine whether the level of planning was a result of the growth of the community, whether the growth of the community was a result of the role of the administrator, or if the role of the administrator was a result of the growth.

Research with an eye toward the chronology of each case may be best in determining these factors. This “chronological research” encompasses several different data forms such as the aforementioned interviews and documentation and the use of observation, as were described as primary case study sources of evidence by Robert Yin (1994). Data from the surveys and interviews with the members of the governing bodies should be able to determine both the role of the administrator, and when the administrator was hired. Additionally, they should be able to generally acknowledge whether growth was some factor in hiring the particular administrator, and if the role was a priority at the time. Census data can provide a general idea of whether a community has been growing in population, shrinking in population, or remaining stagnant. However, the administrator of each community may need to be questioned regarding significant periods of time within population trends. This information may help to determine whether the growth or decline may have occurred before or after a manager that perceived certain roles was hired. Thus, by isolating when an administrator entered the community that valued certain roles creates the possibility of cause and effect.
**Observation**

The final data collection method, and possibly the most intensive method of research, would be direct observation. In this form of study, the researcher measures the incidence of certain behaviors directly in the location where the phenomenon takes place (Yin, 1994). This type of research would encompass nearly all of the data collection methods mentioned before, as well as attending meetings and physically spending time with the administrators of the cities in question. Thus, the researcher could make direct observations regarding the cases studied, including the roles exhibited by the administrator and a number of the characteristics of good city planning. However, the timing by which the researcher studies the participating cities is crucial to account for the community growth factor. In this case, the researcher would need to use available census population data and develop criteria from a review of literature to determine the cities with the highest likelihood of growth and decline. Again, this type of research is the most intensive, but when aligned with the review of documentation and various interviews and surveys discussed previously, would create an extraordinary amount of data and familiarity of the researcher (Yin, 1994).

**Issues**

It should be mentioned that this additional research would pose a number of issues for the researcher. First, the additional lines of inquiry proposed would take a substantial amount of time and effort on behalf of the researcher. This could range from a number of months for the review of documentation and surveys/interviews, to years if the researcher would choose the path of direct observation (Yin, 1994).

Second, there appear to be several issues with each of the specific types of data collection. In terms of surveys and case study interviews with members of the governing body, this would potentially necessitate a significantly larger number of interviews than the original
administrator-related research. Also, arranging personal interviews with these individuals may be difficult to arrange at the convenience of both the interviewer and the participant. In regard to the review of documentation, the review of planning policies such as zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations is definitely a possibility, but can also be very tedious and time consuming (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Yin, 1994). However, one of the key documents with which these ordinances are supposed to be compared is the comprehensive plan, which may be nearly nonexistent in many communities. Also, during personal interviews with administrators, there was a casual probe into the availability of such things as staff reports and meeting minutes. The administrators interviewed noted that these documents generally provided little detail in these smaller communities and may not be of much help to the study. Likewise, in the case of observation research, it would be crucial to determine the time in which some of the communities were about to reach a period of growth or decline. As census data acts as a primary recourse in this matter, this causes difficulties because the census accounts for primarily historical data. However, some population projections may be available for this purpose.

Thirdly, there appears to be a substantial disconnect between the definition of a comprehensive plan as found in planning research, and the small town administrators’ definitions of a comprehensive plan. This primary study indicated that some administrators felt that a land use map was the only component to a comprehensive plan, while planning literature indicates that the land use map is just one of several critical components. Likewise, some of the administrators studied in this research did not know that there was a difference between a zoning map and a future land use map. Thus, results of the survey conducted as a part of this study, as well as the survey conducted by IDRO (Borich, et. al, 2000) referenced by this study may be inaccurate. Each study simply asks administrators (or city officials in the case of the IDRO study) whether they have a comprehensive plan. If there is inadequate knowledge regarding what defines a true comprehensive plan, this may indicate other issues administrators may have
in understanding land use policies such as zoning or subdivision regulation. At a minimum, this would indicate that follow-up research utilizing a similar format to the aforementioned surveys should include a clear and concise definition of a comprehensive plan that would differentiate between it and a land use map. If this information is included in subsequent surveys, it may greatly assist in the selection of future case studies.

Finally, if the additional surveys and interviews with council members are pursued, the researcher should pursue the same with administrators concurrently. The first reason for this is that the current data is now nearly one year old. During the course of this study, it was found that at least five of the fifteen survey respondents are no longer employed by the cities in which they responded to questionnaires. Also, several questions that could result in significant data for the study were not originally phrased properly, and the questions need to be asked again. These include the question of the role of the educational background of the administrator, the planning background of the administrator, and the use of outside resources in the development of planning policy. More specifically, these questions need to be changed to include a series of possible pre-defined responses rather than fill-in-the-blank. For instance, instead of simply asking an administrator about his or her most recent degree, they should be able to select from the choices of: bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, in public administration, in planning, in business, etc. Nevertheless, despite the associated difficulties, any of these lines of inquiry would provide better triangulation and an increase in the validity of the study, and would account for an increase in the number of factors studied.

The study, as is, provides some valuable information. The level of planning in Iowa’s small communities is generally lacking. There is a spectrum of role perceptions among city administrators in Iowa’s small towns, and they do appear that they may fall along the lines of the contemporary administrative style and the traditional administrative style. There appears to be some correlation between city growth, the role of the administrator, and the quality of planning
in each Iowa community. However, additional data is needed to provide added internal validity and determine causation. This additional information includes further data collection on the perceived roles of the administrator, why the administrator may embody such roles, additional review of documentation to determine the true level of planning in a community as well as the cause behind the perceived roles of the administrator, and how other factors such as growth and education enter the equation. In any case, this research question of the impact of the role of the administrator on small town Iowa planning could potentially be a key in training future administrators, the hiring of future administrators, and in as a result, the future viability of Iowa’s small towns.
WORKS CITED


## APPENDIX A:

### IOWA CITIES MATCHING STUDY CRITERIA

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>1990pop</th>
<th>2000pop</th>
<th>2003projpop</th>
<th>90-00 %</th>
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<th>CP Adpt</th>
<th>CP Updt</th>
<th>Z Adpt</th>
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*Source: Borich, et. al., 2000*
APPENDIX B:
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Official job title (Circle One): Manager    Administrator    Other: ____________

Form of government for your city (Council-Manager, Mayor-Council, etc.): ____________

1. What is your most recent degree? ____________________________________________

2. Did you take any planning courses while pursuing your degree(s)? □ Yes □ No
   a. If yes, approximately how many courses: ________

3. Have you had any other form of planning education (conferences, seminars, etc.)? □ Yes □ No
   a. If yes, please characterize: _____________________________________________

4. Has your city updated its comprehensive plan in the past 10 years? □ Yes □ No

5. On a scale of 1-5, how would you characterize the relationship of the following planning
   policies to your city’s comprehensive plan (1= weak relationship, 5= strong relationship):
   a. Zoning Ordinance  1  2  3  4  5
   b. Subdivision Regulations  1  2  3  4  5
   c. Capital Improvements Program  1  2  3  4  5
   d. Sign Regulations  1  2  3  4  5

6. On a scale of 1-5, how would you characterize the strength of county planning for the county
   in which your city is located (1= Weak, 3=Adequate, 5=Strong)?
   1  2  3  4  5

7. Has your city utilized any of the following as a primary means of creating planning policy in
   the past 10 years? If yes, for what policy?
   a. City Staff/Officials □ Yes □ No for: ________________
   b. Council of Government □ Yes □ No for: ________________
   c. University □ Yes □ No for: ________________
   d. Private Firm □ Yes □ No for: ________________
8. On a scale of 1-5, please characterize the likelihood of the following to initiate change in planning policy for your city (1=low likelihood, 5=high likelihood):
   a. Elected Officials 1 2 3 4 5
   b. Developer 1 2 3 4 5
   c. Citizen 1 2 3 4 5
   d. Manager/Administrator 1 2 3 4 5

9. On a scale of 1-5, please characterize the following roles of the city manager/administrator as they best apply to you (1=inaccurately descriptive of your role, 5=accurately descriptive of your role):
   a. Technical Advisor 1 2 3 4 5
   b. Consensus Builder 1 2 3 4 5
   c. Policy Innovator 1 2 3 4 5
   d. Political Liaison 1 2 3 4 5
   e. Broker of Power 1 2 3 4 5
   f. Policy Implementer 1 2 3 4 5

10. May I contact you for additional information? □ Yes □ No
    If yes, which is the preferred method? □ Phone: ______________________
    Contact Name: ______________________  □ Email: ______________________
    City: ______________________

Would you like a copy of the survey results? □ Yes □ No

May I use your name or the name of your city in the survey results? □ Yes □ No

Signature and Date (if yes) ______________________
## APPENDIX C:

### CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

<table>
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<th>Comprehensive Plan Required Chapters/Elements</th>
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<td>Author Firm (Baer)</td>
<td>Included</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons Involved in Creation (Baer)</td>
<td>Included</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Included</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Referenced from Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook (Meck, 2002) unless otherwise noted.
APPENDIX D:
INTERVIEW LINE OF INQUIRY

Roles
1. As a city administrator, what do you believe are some of your key roles?
   a. In the survey conducted earlier, you seemed to relate well/not relate to roles of the manager such as political liaison, broker of power, and consensus builder. Can you describe how you feel about those roles as an administrator?

Development of Policy
2. Do you conduct the majority of planning functions for your city, or do you outsource to a firm, COG, or the county?
3. Overall, to what extent does the city utilize its comprehensive plan?
   a. What factors influence your utilization of the comprehensive plan?
   b. How do you determine when you review your comprehensive plan?
4. How well do you believe your zoning ordinance assists in the implementation of the city’s comprehensive plan?
   a. Your city’s subdivision regulations?
   b. Your city’s CIP?
   c. What influences these relationships?
5. Can you describe the process of changing your zoning or subdivision policies?
   a. Who typically proposes the policy change?
   b. Who is involved in writing the policy?
      i. Staff
      ii. Legal Counsel
      iii. Contracted Firms
6. Can you describe the process of creating the city’s CIP?
   a. When developing the CIP, to what extent do you consult:
      i. The Planning Commission?
      ii. Other governmental entities?
7. When changing planning policy, to what extent are alternatives given?
Current Planning

8. When creating a new subdivision, who typically installs or pays for public improvements?

9. In regards to the city’s zoning ordinance, do many non-conforming cases exist within the city?
   a. What are some of the main causes of non-conforming properties?

Influences

10. Overall, what do you believe are the key factors that influence the way your community conducts land use planning?

11. To what extent do you think your roles as city administrator impact planning in your community?
# APPENDIX E:
## CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

### Zoning Ordinance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to Comp Plan (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Changes derived from Comp Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change Results in Change to Comp Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change Independent from Comp Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Mandatory Yearly Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory Review (Not Yearly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Particular Review Mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternatives (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Staff Developes and Presents Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alternatives not often Presented, but Requested by Govt Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Involvement (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Beyond Required Public Hearings (Task Forces/Committees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only Required Public Input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enforcement (Daniels, et al.)</strong></td>
<td>Many Non-Conforming resulting from Current Practice (Many Variances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Conforming Situations from &quot;Grandfathering&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Enforcement and Consistent Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Writing (Daniels, et al.)</strong></td>
<td>COG/Firm Consulted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed by City Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed by Elected Officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legality (Daniels, et al.)</strong></td>
<td>City Land Use Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commonly Consulted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Land Use Attorney Consulted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Land Use Attorney Rarely Consulted</td>
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### Subdivision Regulations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Scale</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to Comp Plan (Bowyer)</strong></td>
<td>Developed in order to Implement Comp Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change Results in Change to Comp Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change Independent from Comp Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Mandatory Yearly Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory Review (Not Yearly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change Independent from Comp Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternatives (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Staff Developes and Presents Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alternatives not often Presented, but Requested by Govt Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Involvement (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Beyond Required Public Hearings (Task Forces/Committees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only Required Public Input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Required Improvements (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Developer Installs/Pays for Public Improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>City/Developer Share Installation of Public Improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City Commonly Installs Public Improvements</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Writing (Daniels, et al.)</strong></td>
<td>COG/Firm Consulted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed by City Staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Land Use Attorney Consulted</td>
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<td>Land Use Attorney Rarely Consulted</td>
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### Capital Improvements Program

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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to Comp Plan (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>CIP Created to Implement Comp Plan</td>
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<td>CIP May Result in Change to Comp Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CIP Created Independent from Comp Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alternatives (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Staff Developes and Presents Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alternatives not often Presented, but Requested by Govt Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Involvement (Anderson)</strong></td>
<td>Beyond Required Public Hearings (Task Forces/Committees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only Required Public Input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning Commission Involvement (Bowyer)</strong></td>
<td>Required Involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Involved, but not Mandatory or Involved for Informational Purposes Only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intergovernmental Collaboration (Tigue)</strong></td>
<td>Intergovernmental Collaboration for Projects on a Regular Basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intergovernmental Collaboration for Projects on a Limited Basis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Intergovernmental Collaboration</td>
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