

JOHNSON COUNTY

Planning, Development and Sustainability Department

Annual Report 2023

Director's Welcome

2023 was a year of change, represented by several updated job descriptions and a temporary office relocation while the Administration Building is under renovation. The PDS Department ceased business operations for only one day to move all operations, files, furniture, and office plants. All the planning for this move paid off! The updates to the job descriptions promoted four existing PDS team members based on their consistently going above and beyond what is required of the position.

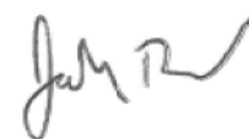
I am also happy to report the Department's noteworthy accomplishments and collaborations. After months of work with a solar developer, 50-acres was rezoned for a Utility-Scale Solar Facility that is designed to produce several megawatts of electricity for local electrical grid consumers. PDS, together with the Secondary Roads Department and the County Attorney's Office, worked with the developer of the Spartan Hollow subdivision to create a public-private partnership that will improve Dillons Furrow Road, add the necessary turn-lanes to State Highway 1, and unlock a large swath of residential growth area.

PDS also began the update of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan during the summer of 2023. Two joint meetings with the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, three public input sessions, and an online survey were hosted to receive input for the plan update – a project still in progress.

With PDS leadership and Board of Supervisor support, work is being done right now to bring new fiber-based broadband internet to nearly 200 homes located in the rural areas and small towns. Sustainability staff also completed the County's first County-wide Greenhouse Gas Inventory and helped create the Middle Iowa River Watershed Management Authority, which received a planning grant from the Iowa DNR. Of course, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Building Division and Code Enforcement, who, from 100+ degree summer days to 23 inches of snow and bitter cold, performed thousands of inspections, issued 652 building permits, and resolved numerous outstanding code enforcement issues.

I cannot speak more highly of the people who make up the PDS Team. Most noteworthy are the support staff that keep the office running smoothly. Unfortunately, Julia Dodds, a dear colleague who served as a department clerk, passed away this year. This report recognizing the success of the department is dedicated to her. I'm very pleased to share the report with the Board of Supervisors, all county departments and offices, our customers, and the public.

Respectfully,



Josh Busard

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Fringe Area Agreements

- Staff, the Board of Supervisors, and City representatives worked together to draft new fringe area agreements which give cities input on county developments close to their boundaries.
- Three new agreements were adopted by the County and the respective City Councils of Solon, North Liberty, and Swisher/Cedar Rapids.

Rural Economic Development

- A broadband needs study was managed by PDS, resulting in three Broadband Intervention Zones that increase funding to rural telecommunication companies.
- Downtown audits in the smaller towns and an agritourism networking group were facilitated by Greater IC's Rural Economic Development Director, who works closely with PDS.

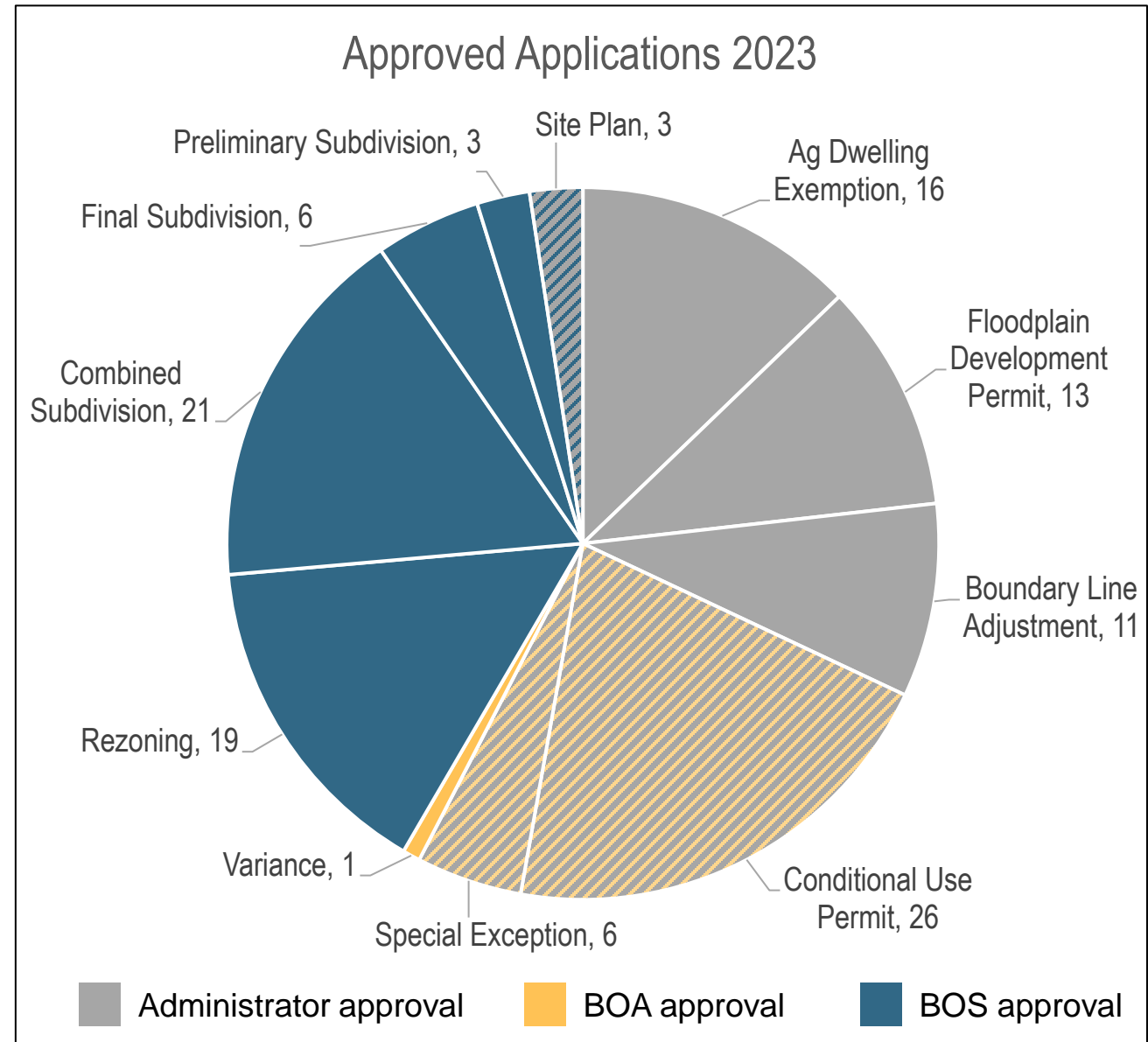
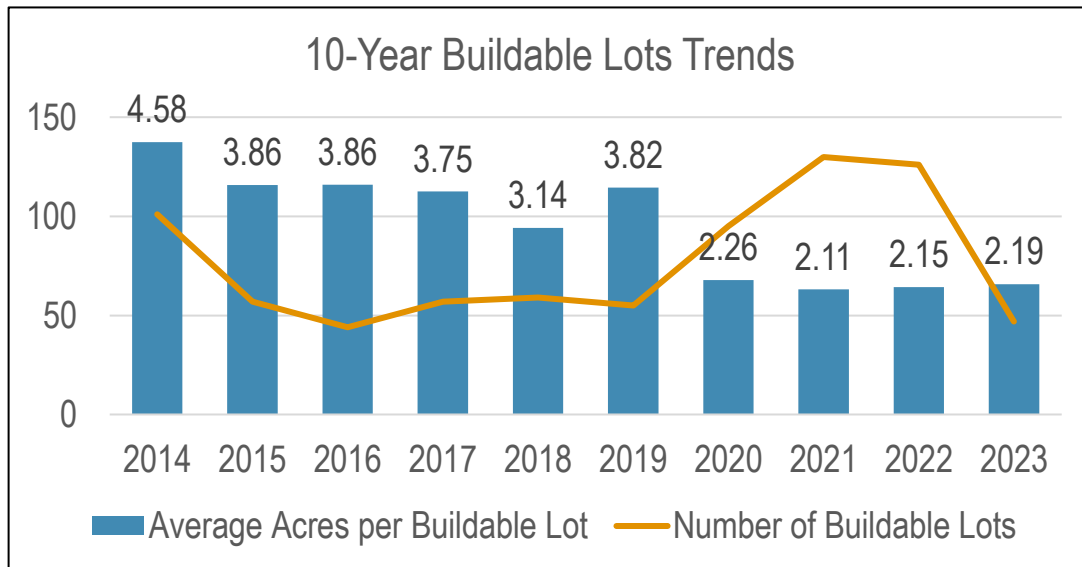
Climate Change and Resiliency

- A countywide greenhouse gas inventory was completed by PDS staff which showed a 28% reduction in emissions from 2010 to 2020. This report will serve as the basis for future climate action planning.
- PDS led the County's efforts to leverage energy and sustainability opportunities and funding through the Inflation Reduction Act, including a collaboration with the ECICOG.

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Subdivisions

30 subdivisions were approved, platting 47 buildable lots and 43 outlots. While this is the smallest number of buildable lots since 2016, the average lot size has remained consistent since 2020, when the current ordinance was adopted.



Rezoning

19 rezoning applications were approved in 2023, 14 of which were historic residential rezonings. One rezoning created nearly 60 acres of commercial and industrial development and another zoned 50 acres for a utility-scale solar project. The remaining three rezoned for additional residential land.



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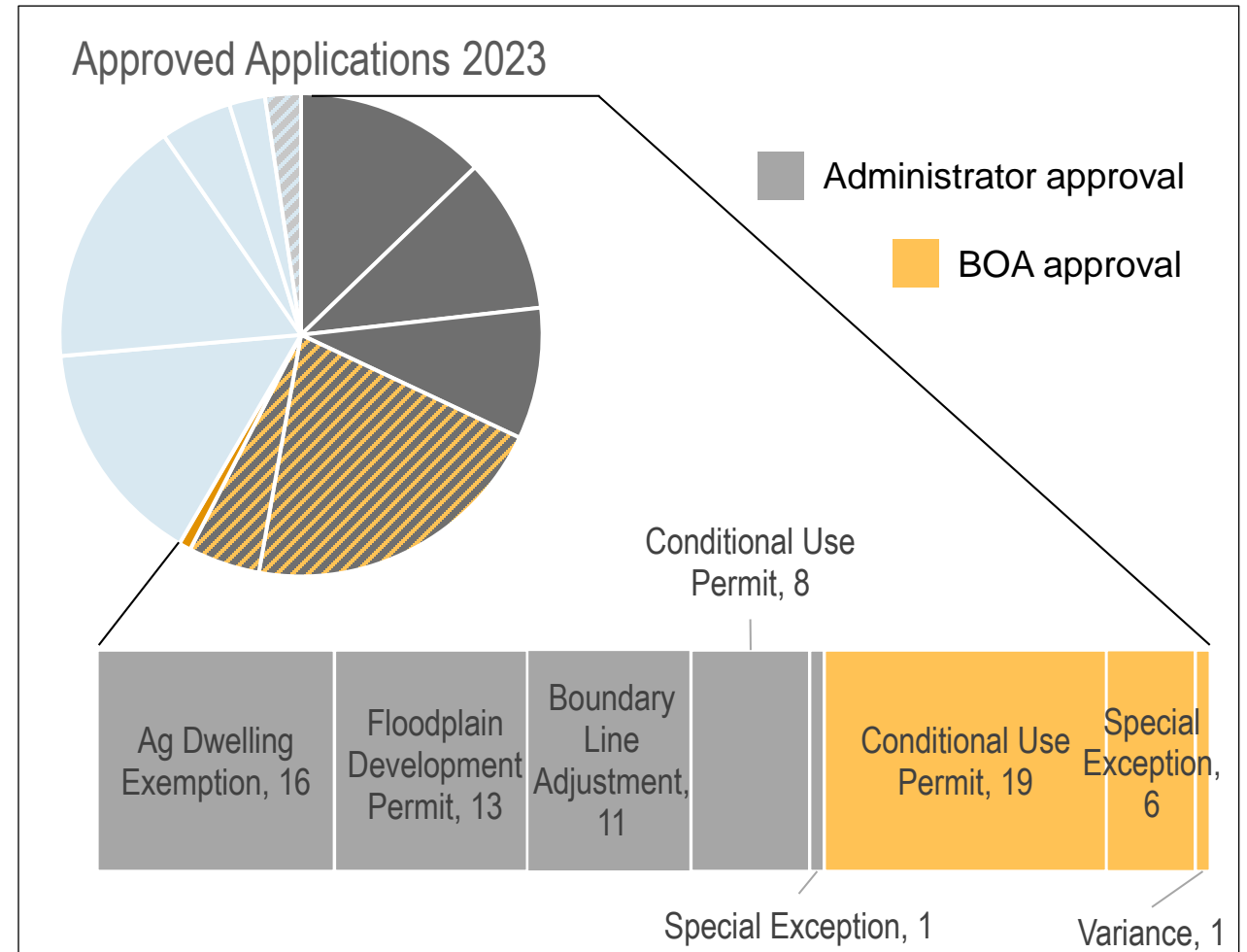
Other Applications

In 2023, the Board of Adjustment approved 19 Conditional Use Permits (including ADUs, home businesses, and special events) and six special exceptions for setback reductions.

A notable number of administrative approvals (35% of development applications) were granted for many technical requests such as floodplain development, boundary line adjustments, and one-time special events.

Sensitive Areas Protected by the UDO:

Critical wildlife habitat	Floodplain and floodway	Historic properties
Wetlands	Prairie and prairie remnants	Woodlands
Savanna and savanna remnants	Significant slopes	Stream corridors, watercourses, & surface water

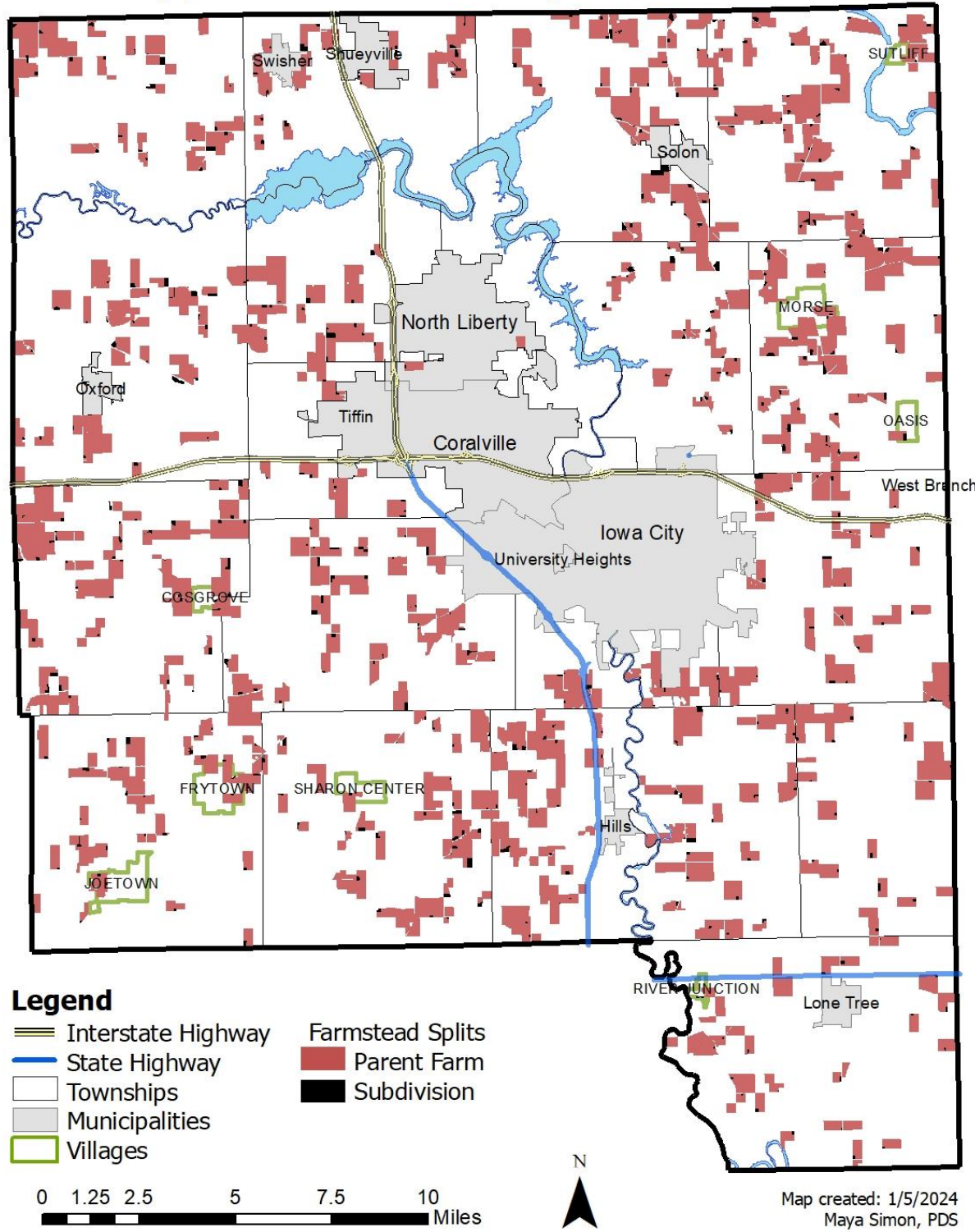


Environmental Protection

2023 saw a total of 55 waiver requests and reports for Sensitive Areas, effectively preserving 17 acres of woodlands, 1.5 acres of wetlands, and over half a mile of stream corridors and watercourses. Six Stormwater Management reports and 30 Erosion and Sediment Control Permits were also reviewed, mitigating runoff from new development.

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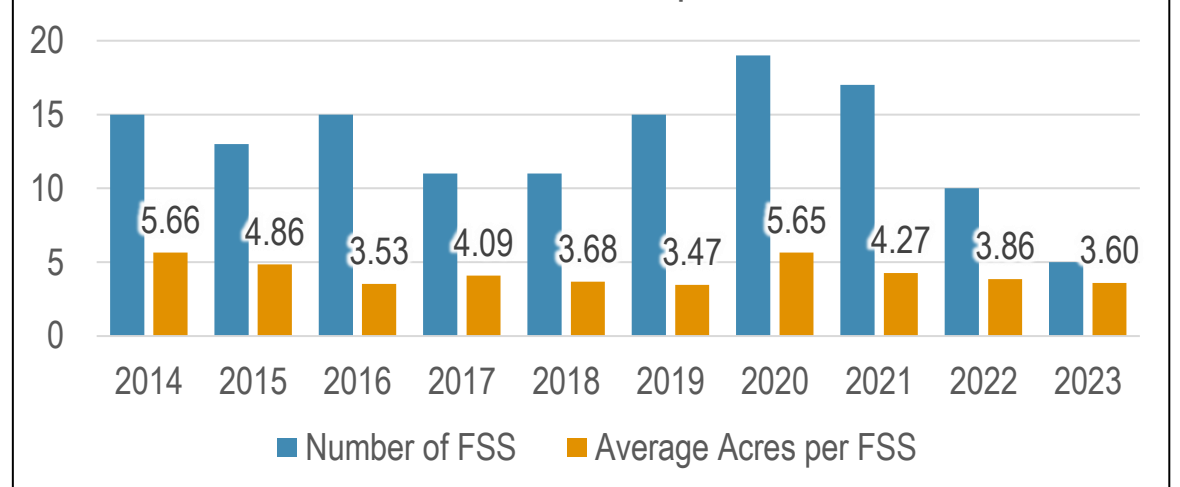
Approved Farmstead Splits Since 2000



Farmstead Splits

Johnson County has approved 455 farmstead splits (FSS) since 2000 (an average of 19.7 splits per year). Only 5 were approved in 2023 although many farms are still eligible.

10-Year Farmstead Splits Trends

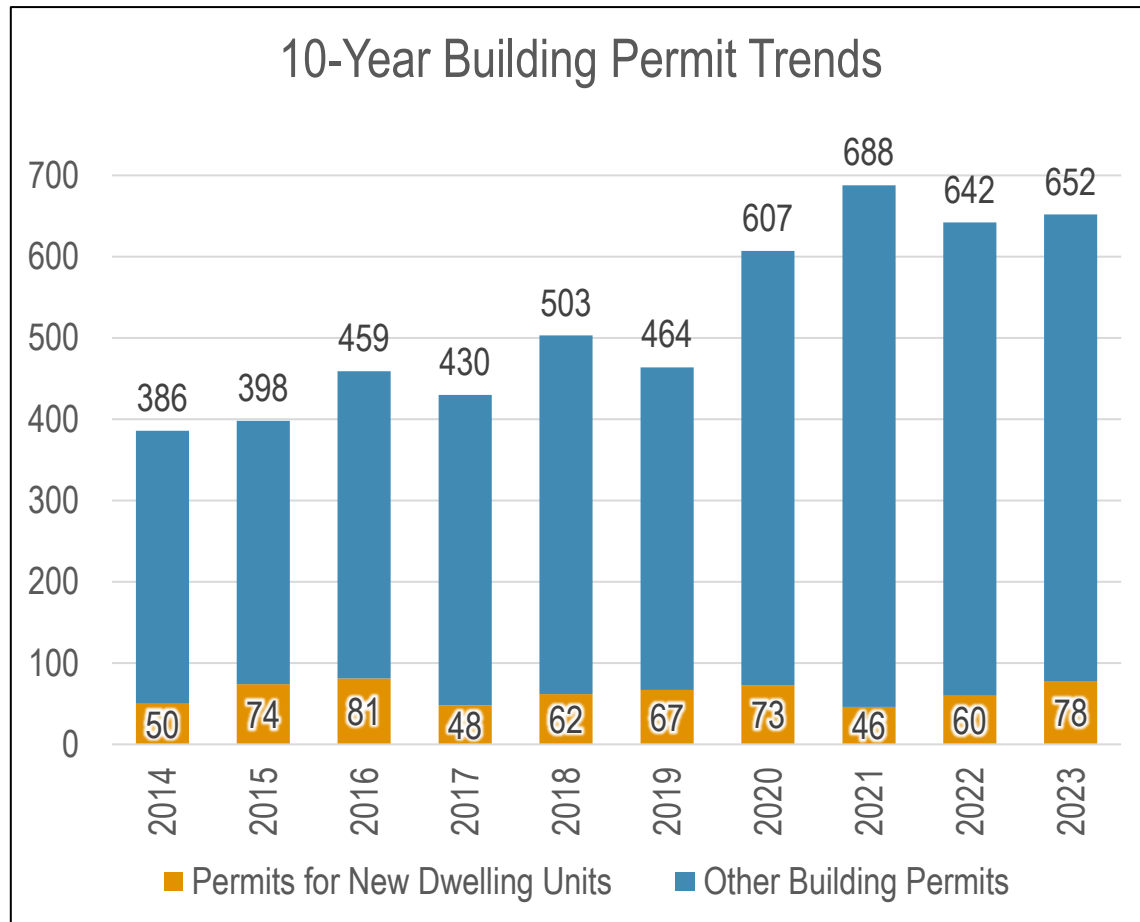


Ordinance Amendments

Two staff-initiated, omnibus ordinance amendments were adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2023. These amendments updated various requirements in the subdivision and environmental sections of the Unified Development Ordinance.



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Building Permits

Although new single-family dwellings were only 7.7% of permits issued in 2023, they accounted for 55.9% of total permit valuation. Those new dwellings, along with 28 manufactured homes, resulted in the second-highest number of homes started in Johnson County since 2005. Of the 652 total building permits issued, most were for electrical work (22%), dwelling additions (13%), and accessory buildings (11%).

Code Enforcement

PDS pursues code enforcement cases to protect neighboring properties and ensure the safety of the general public. 99 cases were opened in 2023, which is the highest annual number since the creation of the Code Enforcement Inspector position in 2020. Overall, 298 of 340 cases (87%) have been closed. Many issues remain ongoing, and it can take several months for PDS to work with a property owner towards compliance or take legal action.

Cause of Code Enforcement Cases:

Violating building code	Threat to health, safety, and general welfare	Violating rental housing code
Unpermitted home business	Unpermitted development in the floodplain	Unpermitted second dwelling
Junk on property	Non-compliant signs	Violating CUP conditions of approval

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Communitywide Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventories

With external partners, the Sustainability Coordinator completed the County's first-ever communitywide inventory of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Overall, there was a 28% decrease in GHG emissions from 2010 to 2020. The sector-specific findings, such as for transportation and buildings, will help the County identify actions to reduce GHGs.



Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

Sustainability partnered with Grants, Fleet and other county departments to leverage an IRA Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant voucher award for a fleet study, which is expected to begin in 2024. Staff also worked the ECICOG and other local jurisdictions to pave the way for IRA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant planning and implementation grants.



Soil Health Program

Initiated in 2022, this program provides financial incentive to residents in the unincorporated area and smaller towns to implement soil quality restoration on private property. In 2023, a total of 37 households participated. The process combines deep-tine aeration and the addition of compost on lawns to reduce runoff while greening up grass.



Watershed Coordination

In cooperation with the Iowa DNR, PDS led the effort to officially establish the Middle Iowa Watershed Management Authority (WMA), bringing together partner organizations from 10 counties to work toward shared watershed planning and goals. The Environmental Regulations Coordinator also continued to serve as a board member for the Creek Watershed Coalition and the English River WMAs, both of which closed out Iowa Watershed Approach projects and funding in 2023.

2024 Department Goals

Rental permitting with new online portal

- Work with IT to move to new online permitting software which will streamline the application and review process.
- Adopt a rental housing code created by PDS and develop a program for inspections and permitting, once online software is in place.

Comprehensive Plan Update

- Draft and adopt the third volume update of the Comprehensive Plan based on input gathered in late 2023 from the public, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Board of Supervisors.
- Begin working on the new goals, strategies, and action steps.

Sustainability and environmental initiatives

- Develop a program to educate and provide residents in the unincorporated area with high-value native plants.
- Initiate a soil sampling program to establish baseline soil conditions in the County ROW and explore the impacts of land management practices on soil health.
- Launch EECEBG Fleet Study to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Complete the IRA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant priority planning phase and begin comprehensive planning phase.
- Collaborate with Iowa City on extending free energy audits to households in the unincorporated area and smaller towns.

Department Information

Staffing

Joe Wilensky was promoted to Planner in May after obtaining his AICP credential. This year, PDS had the opportunity to update five of our 13 job descriptions. As a result, Kasey Hutchinson, Jeff Huff, and Nancy Rockensies have new titles.

Staff invested in professional development by attending 21 local and national conferences, obtaining or renewing 60+ professional certifications, and participating in dozens of safety, DEI, and other relevant trainings. PDS employees also served on 30 boards and committees connected with their positions.

Josh Busard , AICP, CFM, LEED-AP, <i>Director</i>			
Nathan Mueller , AICP, CFM, <i>Assistant Director</i>			
Neil Bombei <i>Senior Building Inspector</i>	Jeff Huff <i>Zoning Inspector</i>	Becky Soglin LEED Green Associate CC-P <i>Sustainability Coordinator</i>	Nancy Rockensies <i>Office Manager</i>
Bret McLaughlin <i>Senior Combination Inspector</i>	Joseph Wilensky AICP <i>Planner</i>	Kasey Hutchinson <i>Environmental Regulations Coordinator</i>	
Dominic Perneti <i>Combination Inspector</i>	Maya Simon AICP <i>Assistant Planner</i>	Brandon Davis <i>Code Enforcement Inspector</i>	
			Chris Ahern , <i>Office Assistant</i> (hired Feb. 2024)

Hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday

Location: 913 S Dubuque St, Iowa City, Iowa
(temporary location: 855 S Dubuque St)

Website: www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/pds

Phone: (319) 356-6083, **Fax:** (319) 356-6084

2023 Boards and Commissions

Board of Supervisors

Jon Green, Lisa Green-Douglass (2023 Chair), V Fixmer-Oraiz, Royceann Porter, Rod Sullivan

Planning and Zoning Commission

Rebecca Frantz, Kimberly Friese, Erin Hazen, Mike Parker (2023 Chair), Andrew Philbrick

Board of Adjustment

Richard Donahue*, Michael Garcia*, Jerad Krall*, Perry Ross, Kathleen Sluka, Dawn Terrell (2023 Chair)

*served for part of 2023

Building Code Board of Appeals

Dave Clark, Mike Donahue, Tristian Gingerich, Doug Kohoutek, Wade Long

