



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

**2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program**  
**Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form**  
**(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)**

**Deadline for Nominations Extended to March 30, 2015**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

**SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program**

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: "Newton's Future" Implementation

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of Newton, IA

Jurisdiction population(s): 15,254

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: October Year: 2012

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Robert Knabel

Title: City Administrator Jurisdiction: City of Newton, IA

Name: Natalie Umsted

Title: Management Analyst Jurisdiction: City of Newton, IA

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Natalie Umsted

Title: Management Analyst Jurisdiction: City of Newton

Street address: 101 W 4th St S

City: Newton, IA State/Province: IA

Zip/Postal Code: 50208 Country: USA

Telephone: 641-791-0859 Fax: 641-792-9248

E-mail: natalieu@newtongov.org



## **“Newton’s Future: A Comprehensive Plan” Implementation**

**Nomination for Program Excellence in Community Sustainability, March 2015**

### **Problem assessment**

In 2006, Whirlpool announced that it would be pulling Maytag out of Newton- sending both an economic and emotional blow throughout the community. Newton residents long identified with the dependable, reliable image of the Maytag Company, and upon the company’s closure, Newton struggled to maintain a positive identity within the community and within the region. There was a need for a collective leadership effort to assist the Newton community in overcoming this challenge not only in regards to the economy, but also regarding the emotional, physical, and aesthetic health of the community.

### **Program Implementation and Costs**

In 2012, momentum in the community was growing and it became clear that Newton was ready to set the course for a bright future. City Council and Staff led the development of *Newton’s Future: A Comprehensive Plan*. Developed with the input of citizens through workshops, surveys, and planning meetings, *Newton’s Future* is the articulation of resident desires and ideas, a strategic approach to improving and

leveraging Newton's strengths, and a vision for the future. It is a unique approach to comprehensive planning and is clearly different from the standard run-of-the-mill land use focused comprehensive plans and includes chapters on challenges such as mental and physical health, community identity, education, and sustainability.

*Newton's Future* is not only the City of Newton's official policy and strategic approach for land use and growth, but it has also been designed to be the plan for the entire community. It offers a very clear checklist of "things to do" to make Newton a great place to call home. The implementation of *Newton's Future* has been a challenge embraced not only by City Council and City Staff, but also by community organizations, businesses, and volunteers and a number of projects, or rather, "things to do," are currently being implemented.

For the creation of the plan, the City applied for an Iowa Smart Planning Grant and received \$18,000. The City then matched this grant with staff time and money, for a total project cost of \$32,000 for plan development. After the plan was completed and adopted, the Newton City Council dedicated \$250,000 to jump-start implementation. The steering committee which oversaw the development of *Newton's Future* transformed into "Implementing Newton's Future" and serves as a citizen advisory group which designated the initial \$250,000 and works to encourage businesses, community organizations, and volunteers to take on tasks from the Comprehensive Plan. In the most recent City Council budgeting process, the Comprehensive Plan was used as a guide in developing the budget, so that high-priority tasks from the Comprehensive Plan will be completed.

## **Tangible Results/Measurable Outcomes**

Each chapter of *Newton's Future* included a checklist of "things to do." The plan lists 170 things to do, and as of March 2015, over 60 projects have either been completed or are currently in process. A few highlights of plan projects either completed or underway include:

- Acceptance in to the Main Street Iowa Program
- New way-finding signage
- Acceptance of downtown onto the National Register of Historic Places
- Community branding, marketing, and outreach campaign
- Acceptance into Keep Iowa Beautiful community beautification program
- Community gateway/entryway improvements
- Creation of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue of Sculpture and Art Program
- Creation of energy conservation program in partnership with Alliant Energy and Black Hills Energy
- Development of the Newton Wellness Coalition
- Improving hazardous or uncontrolled intersections
- Park and Ride study
- Incentives for construction of new homes
- Re-funding of the Dangerous and Dilapidated Program which removes blighted properties from neighborhoods
- Increased retail analysis and recruitment efforts
- Expansion of the Hike and Bike Trail system

- Installation of new playground equipment
- Sidewalk infill
- Updated site plan and subdivision ordinances

### **Lessons Learned**

The most transferable lesson learned throughout this project is the importance of making community plans engaging, dynamic, and accessible. In Newton, the new plan needed to provide a new direction and identity for the community and serve as something for the community to rally around. Creating a plan that was easy-to-read and empowering for individuals to take action has led to successful implementation of the plan, not only by the City government, but also by other community groups. The City produced three versions of *Newton's Future* to ensure accessibility—the full 100+ page plan, an 18-page quick guide, and a one page summary. The plan is available for citizens to read online and information about the plan has been shared via social media.

Additionally, the importance of listening to citizen input and working with citizens to build the vision of the community has been an important lesson learned. Building and articulating a community vision was major priority of the planning process. Without a clear sense of what Newton is and what the community wishes to achieve, the success of this planning and implementation effort would have been limited.