

Growth Experience



How the City of Bondurant, Iowa, is rising to meet the challenges of rapid population growth and serving as a role model for other communities.

BY ADAM POWELL

The City of Bondurant, Iowa, is a small but rapidly growing municipality that has become a model for innovation in local government. With a population on the rise and increasing demands on municipal services, the city recognized the need to implement

strategic programs to address the challenges of growth. Bondurant's leadership responded with two distinct initiatives: a compensation philosophy and policy designed to attract and retain top-tier talent, and a targeted business/industry program aimed at fostering economic development and addressing critical service gaps. These programs, while separate in their goals and implementation, reflect the city's commitment to sustainability, innovation, and fiscal responsibility.

These achievements are made possible by the efforts of dedicated city staff who bring a wealth of expertise to their roles. Jené Jess, Bondurant's finance and employee services director, has been with the city for seven years. With a master's degree in public administration focused

on human resources, and certifications such as the Society for Human Resource Management's certified professional (SHRM-CP) and GFOA's certified public finance officer (CPFO), Jess has been instrumental in developing the city's compensation philosophy, ensuring that its workforce remains competitive and motivated. She's also played a key role in the development of the city's targeted business/industry program by leading the financial review of the initiative. Working alongside her is Craig Marshman, administrative services coordinator, who has served the City of Bondurant for over five years. Marshman, a political science graduate with expertise in human resources and finance, has been pivotal in implementing tools like a new recruiting solution and new budget transparency tool, which have streamlined operations and enhanced workforce planning.

The compensation philosophy and policy emerged as a key strategy to support the city's expanding workforce. As Bondurant grew, the need for a structured, competitive, and transparent approach to employee compensation became clear. By aligning salaries with market standards, implementing merit-based pay adjustments, and making use

of innovative tools, the city has created a foundation that supports its workforce while ensuring efficient use of resources. This program has been instrumental in helping the city maintain a skilled and motivated workforce, even in a competitive labor market.

On the economic development side, the compensation philosophy and policy was developed to attract businesses that align with Bondurant's priorities and address community needs. By identifying industries that residents valued most, such as healthcare and tourism, the city created a focused strategy to bring essential services and economic opportunities to the area. Through incentives like tax increment financing (TIF) and strategic partnerships, the program has successfully drawn new businesses—including Exemplar Care, owned by Hy-Vee, and Amazon facilities—that have collectively created more than 3,200 jobs.

As municipalities across the nation grapple with similar challenges, the City of Bondurant's story offers valuable lessons. Whether addressing workforce needs or driving economic development, the city's approach demonstrates the importance of strategic planning, adaptability, and community-focused



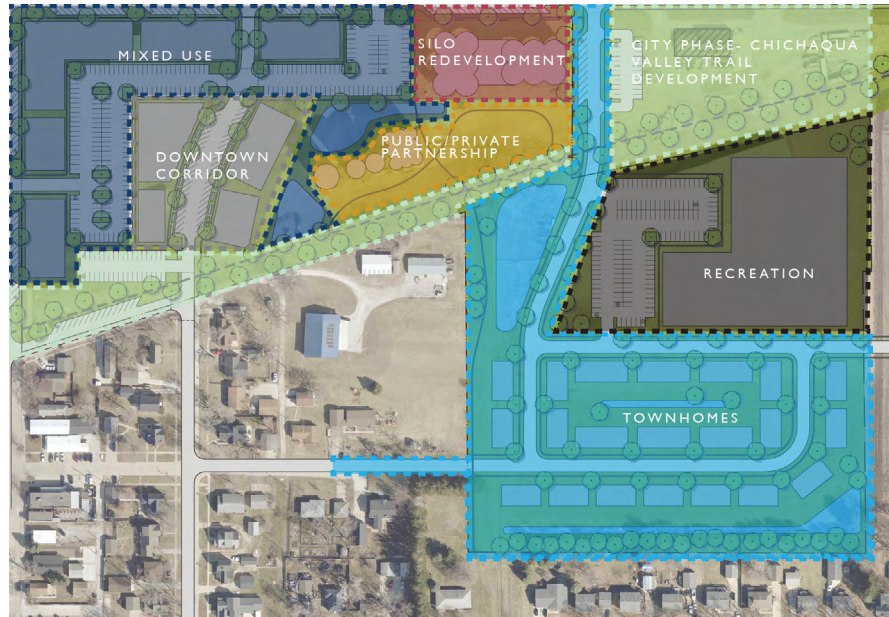
solutions. Bondurant's success is a testament to the potential for even smaller cities to lead in creating programs that have an impact and serve as a blueprint for others.

A strategic approach to workforce management

The City of Bondurant's compensation philosophy and policy represents a forward-thinking approach to workforce management, designed to meet the needs of a growing city while maintaining fiscal responsibility. As Bondurant expanded, city leadership recognized the importance of creating a structured, transparent, and competitive compensation framework to attract and retain top talent. "As a growing city, we knew we needed a compensation philosophy that could keep pace with the market," Jess said. "Our approach has allowed us to manage growth effectively while ensuring we're able to recruit and retain the talent we need."

The compensation philosophy is rooted in market alignment and regular evaluation. The city conducts a market study every three years to benchmark its pay ranges against similar municipalities, while annual adjustments tied to the Midwest Consumer Price Index (CPI) ensure incremental updates that reflect economic trends. "Every year, we increase wages by the Midwest CPI at a specific point in time so we can keep pace with the competitive market," Jess explained. "It's a proactive way to ensure our pay structure remains fair and relevant."

Technology has played a key role in making this approach successful. The city adopted modern workforce management and budgeting tools like ClearGov and NeoGov. Budgeting systems provide detailed personnel budget forecasting, enabling the city to project staffing needs and their financial impacts. Workforce management systems streamline recruitment, onboarding, and performance evaluations, allowing for a consistent and efficient process. "With NeoGov, we've been able to make recruitment and onboarding much



smoother," Marshman said. "It's been a vital tool as our city grows." Jess echoed this sentiment, adding, "These platforms have given us the ability to handle workforce demands without adding unnecessary administrative staff."

The program's impact is clear in the City of Bondurant's improved recruitment and retention outcomes. "We've seen a tremendous difference in the number of applicants and the quality of candidates," Jess noted. A recent assistant library director position drew 56 highly qualified applicants, compared to the two or three applications the city might have received in the past. "We're now able to reach talent pools that were out of our grasp before, and that's a direct result of how we've modernized our approach," Marshman added.

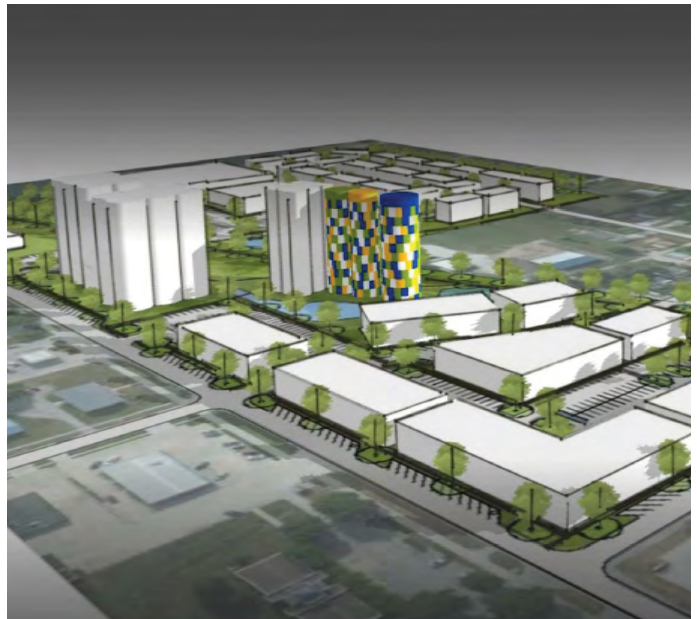
The city's compensation philosophy is a way in which municipalities can align workforce strategies with growth, while remaining fiscally responsible. By leveraging market data, innovative technology, and a commitment to continuous improvement, the city has built a resilient framework that serves both employees and the community. "It's about creating a sustainable structure," Jess said. "We're preparing not just for today, but for the future."

Above and opposite page: The redevelopment of Bondurant's Grain District will transform an underused area of the city to attract new residents and visitors. Plans include multi-family housing, mixed-use commercial space, a recreation center and public space.

Targeting economic growth

The City of Bondurant's targeted business/industry program highlights the city's strategic approach to fostering economic development while addressing critical service gaps. As a fast-growing city—at a rank of 90.3 percent rate, number two in all of Iowa, according to the 2020 census—Bondurant faced unique challenges in attracting businesses that aligned with its community's needs. "We're a fast-growing community, but we're still under that 10,000-citizen mark. It's hard to attract businesses to the community that the citizens want," Jess said. To overcome this barrier, the city designed the program to identify and create incentives for industries that align with the community's priorities.

One of the program's key successes is its partnership with Exemplar Care. This project brought four new jobs to Bondurant and established a clinic that offers urgent care, primary care,



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JENÉ JESS, FINANCE AND EMPLOYEE SERVICES DIRECTOR

and pharmacy services. “It’s not an emergency room, but if your child has a fever in the middle of the night, you have somewhere to go—and there’s a pharmacy,” Jess explained. This project addressed a significant healthcare gap in Bondurant, providing residents with convenient access to essential services and enhancing their quality of life.

The program’s impact extends beyond healthcare. The city has invested in seven certified sites, including Amazon Distribution and Amazon Sortation facilities. These two sites alone have brought 3,200 jobs to the community—2,800 at the distribution center and 400 at the sortation facility. “We’ve been very strategic about targeting industries that bring long-term value to our city,” Jess said. Additional certified sites also helped position Bondurant as a hub for economic activity and employment opportunities.

Bondurant continues to be a national leader in development-ready industrial sites; in fact, it’s achieved a remarkable milestone as the first community in the state to secure four certified sites—Timmins Industrial Park, Bondurant Industrial Park Plat 2, Myers Industrial Site, and an Amazon-used site—reflecting the city’s commitment to economic growth and business attraction.

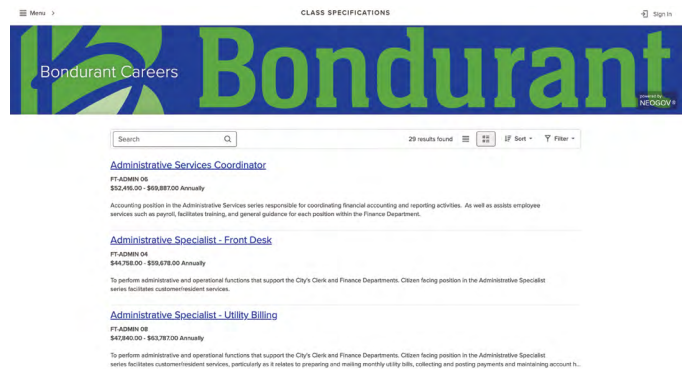
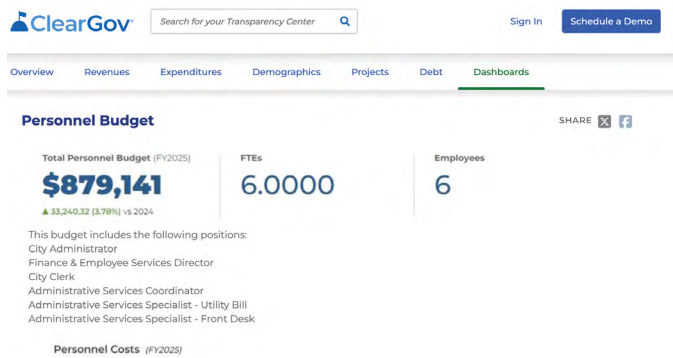
Another cornerstone of the program is the redevelopment of the Grain District, a former grain silo and cooperative site. This project transforms an underused area into a vibrant, mixed-use hub featuring a distillery, boutique hotel, and multi-family housing. “The Grain District is actually a huge, huge investment, and it’s going to be one-of-a-kind,” Jess said. “It’s currently under development and will include multi-family and multi-commercial residential use,

along with entertainment options.” The project aims to attract residents and visitors alike while preserving a piece of Bondurant’s history. [For more information on this project, visit gfoa.org/grain-district-sale.]

The success of the targeted business/industry program lies in its ability to align economic incentives with community goals while maintaining fiscal responsibility. “We typically try to stay within a five-to-seven-year return on investment with property taxes so we know we’re staying structurally sound,” Jess emphasized. By balancing careful financial planning with strategic investments, the city has created an environment where businesses can thrive and residents can benefit from improved services and economic opportunities.

Best practices and lessons learned

The City of Bondurant’s experiences with its compensation philosophy and policy and targeted business/industry program provide valuable lessons for other municipalities looking to address workforce and economic challenges. A key takeaway is the importance of continuous evaluation and refinement to ensure programs remain aligned with their intended goals. “We have a



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policy and process for doing internal audits on everything and to review and do structural reviews to make sure that all programming is running the way it was intended to,” Jess said. This proactive approach has allowed the city to identify areas for improvement and make adjustments as needed.

For instance, one of the lessons learned while the city was implementing the targeted business/industry program was the need for clear eligibility criteria. Initially, businesses that had already committed to locating in Bondurant applied for incentives, which was not the program’s original intent. “We had to revise the policy to clarify that these incentives are for new businesses or projects,” Jess explained. This adjustment ensured that the program could continue to achieve its goal of attracting new industries and filling service gaps.

Collaboration has been another cornerstone of Bondurant’s success. The city’s leadership worked across departments to design and implement these programs, ensuring alignment with broader municipal goals. “Every department played a role, whether it was how interviews are conducted or how we evaluate employees and

businesses,” Jess noted. This collaborative approach not only strengthened the programs but also fostered a sense of shared ownership among staff.

Another important lesson is the value of embracing technology and innovative tools. Bondurant’s use of modern technology has been instrumental in managing growth efficiently and effectively. “It can be expensive and take significant time to implement new software solutions, but it’s important to focus on the long-term value these investments provide,” Marshman said. “Organizations can realize substantial cost savings and operational efficiencies by reducing employee turnover and enhancing budgeting accuracy through tools such as a rolling five-year personnel plan. The initial effort and expense are outweighed by the strategic benefits, making the investment both worthwhile and sustainable.” Jess added, “Expensive is relative. The amount that the software costs is still less than hiring two or three people to manage these processes manually.”

Ultimately, city leadership emphasized the importance of being willing to innovate and adapt. “You can’t be afraid of trying new things, even if there’s a learning curve,” Jess said. The

Above, Bondurant’s investment in new software platforms has helped the city manage growth in an efficient and sustainable way.

city’s proactive mindset has enabled it to create programs that not only address immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for sustainable growth. These lessons offer a clear framework for other municipalities aiming to develop solutions tailored to their unique challenges.

Conclusion

The City of Bondurant’s compensation philosophy and policy and targeted business/industry program demonstrate that even smaller municipalities can create programs that address workforce and economic challenges. By making use of tools, fostering collaboration, and maintaining a commitment to innovation, the city has developed strategies that are not only effective locally but also offer a blueprint for other governments. “It’s about making investments that give us long-term benefits, not just solving the problem at hand,” Jess said. ■

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