

Appendix A: Concept Plan

A Mid-Course Element of the City of Big Lake Comprehensive Plan

The Big Lake “concept plan” is an overview of the main ideas that will guide the preparation of the detailed plan elements of the City’s comprehensive plan.

Purpose: This short document crystallizes the thinking that has occurred thus far in the planning process and, importantly, allows citizens, advisers and officials to determine whether the plan is on the right course. Included are plan objectives, preliminary policy ideas for the comprehensive plan, and a graphic expression of the concept.

Once a consensus is reached on this concept plan, the more detailed plan may be written with confidence that it has political and technical support.

Alternatives Reviewed: The Concept Plan is based on the findings of the Assessment of Conditions and Issues along with an evaluation of the two Conceptual Alternatives. The alternatives were titled:

- **Traditional and Compact**
- **Spread and Suburban**

The two alternatives, presented below, were proposed by the City staff and consulting team then ratified by the Advisory Committee. They were arranged along the topic of city form because that seemed to be the best way to encompass and test the previously identified issues.

The two conceptual alternatives were written to be deliberately extreme and different. The intention was never to choose one or the other, but to generate a discussion about what the community values; the concept plan was always expected to be some blend of the two.

Public Participation for the Concept Plan: Public participation included three meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee, comments received during a presentation at a Coffee with the Mayor event on October 14, 2017, a survey of high school students by a local student, a survey of the Advisory Committee members, a survey of clients of the Big Lake Community Food Shelf.

Plan Objectives

These are desired outcomes of the application of the comprehensive plan over time.

General

1. Big Lake will be a **desirable** place to live, work and play.
2. Big Lake will provide **safety and security** for all, especially families and children.
3. **City government** will be very competent at delivering normal municipal services and does not over-reach.
4. The **property tax rate** will be comparable with those in peer cities.
5. The **property tax base** will grow with more industrial and commercial development plus more highly valued housing.
6. **Private developers** will have more freedom to **innovate** while achieving updated minimum municipal standards.

Land Use, Growth Management and Urban Design

7. Big Lake will retain its **small-town charm** without limiting its ability to grow.
8. **Growth** will occur in a cost-effective manner.
9. Big Lake will **respond to the market** by accommodating developers' requests within reasonable limits.
10. The city will have a **visual center** and arrival point.
11. **Highway 10** will be a more attractive feature and one that unites the community.

Economic Development

12. Big Lake will **attract jobs** by maintaining a business-friendly environment and promoting its competitive advantages compared to other cities.
13. There will be many **well-paying jobs** locally.

Transportation

14. Drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians will move about the city **safely and conveniently**.

Parks and Trails

15. Parks and trails will continue to be an **important element** in providing quality of life and attracting residents.

Neighborhood Design

16. **Desirable residential neighborhoods** will be created by incorporating natural amenities and by building attractive public features where nature has not provided.

Housing

17. Big Lake will **attract housing** by encouraging and supporting employment development and by investing in schools, streets, parks, trees and sidewalks.
18. Residents who want to own a **“move-up” house** will be attracted and retained.
19. There is a wide variety of **housing options** for people in all stages of life.

Concept Plan

Land Use and Growth Management

- **Residential Mixture:** Plan and create a mixture of lot sizes, housing sizes and housing types across the city. Mix housing types, with small areas of multiple-family housing here and there. Within some neighborhoods, have a mixture of housing types, depending on the strategy of the land developer. Plan and zone locations for townhouses and apartments. However, ensure that the value and livability of single-family, detached housing is not harmed when trying to accommodate the need for other housing types.
- **Separate Incompatible Land Uses:** Separate residential and non-residential development outside of the “town center” in order to protect the function and value of each.
- **Spread with a Center:** Develop a combination of spread or low-density neighborhoods surrounding a higher density center. There will be a town center but also some large lots.
- **Compact and Contiguous:** Ensure that development is compact and contiguous to the extent practical.
- **Commercial-Industrial Pattern:** Plan for a pattern of commercial and industrial development in an east-west alignment along Highway 10 but guide the housing pattern to be more centered.
- **Role of the City and Developers:** Allow developers to lead in the design of new development, including lot sizes. Establish minimal standards, such as street widths, and a framework of essential features for the private sector to work within. Essential features include major roads and utilities, commercial or industrial locations, environmental protection and public safety.

Continue to require land developers to improve or extend local and collector streets, minor utility lines, and participate in the cost of improving arterial roads and trunk utility lines.

- **Town Center:** Evolve a “town center,” primarily through the actions of the private sector guided by the vision of the residents, which includes a walkable mixture of businesses, multiple-family housing, civic buildings and public space.
- **Annexation:** Adopt criteria for reviewing annexation petitions so City policies on growth management, fiscal health and land use are furthered. Require annexation or an annexation agreement to receive City sewer and water lines.
- **Utility Service Area:** Plan and enforce a compact area for the extension of City sewer and water lines. Ask Sherburne County to set a minimum residential lot size of 5 acres in Big Lake Township south of the Elk River in order to protect the ability of land near the City to be subdivided and served with sewer and water lines.
- **County Cooperation:** Gain an understanding with the adjacent Town of Big Lake and Sherburne County that there is mutual benefit in staged, orderly utility extensions, annexation and compact urban growth into territory planned and regulated for that purpose.
- **Highway 10 Beautification:** Work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to plant trees either in the right-of-way of Highway 10 or on adjacent private land where right-of-way is insufficient.

Transportation, including Bicycling and Parking

- **Street Network:** Adopt a plan for a network of collector and minor arterial roads that is coordinated with the land use plan.
- **Plan for Complete Streets:** Obtain enough land during the subdivision process to include sidewalks, bike paths, bike lanes and trees on local or collector streets where supported by City plan, policy or ordinance. Ensure that the ability to circulate by automobile is protected.
- **Street Design Guidelines:** Adopt and enforce design guidelines for each type of road.
- **Street Connections:** Allow some cul-de-sac streets, particularly where necessary to serve difficult locations or protect natural resources, but interconnect most local residential streets for the sake of driving, walking and bicycling.
- **Bicycling:** Prepare and adopt a plan for a city-wide system of off-road bicycling paths, on-road striped lanes and signed routes. Connect and extend existing off-road bicycling paths, particularly to serve the parks.
- **Parkway Loop:** Plan a landscaped east-west parkway across the southern part of the city for the sake of traffic movement and to build lasting value in nearby neighborhoods. Add trees to major streets in the northeastern and northwestern parts of the city to make somewhat of a parkway ring.
- **Second Mississippi Bridge:** Support a second Mississippi River bridge at Monticello for the sake of regional, county and local development.
- **Parking:** Allow more business discretion in setting parking quantities; encourage and facilitate negotiations between site owners on shared parking.
- **Safe Routes to School:** Create routes for walking or bicycling to school.

- **Highway 10 Support Roads:** Plan and build a system of streets that complement and run parallel to Highway 10. Examples include Martin Avenue or Marketplace Drive.

Economic Development

- **Present Approach:** Continue the present approach to economic development, which is moderately aggressive.
- **Local Businesses:** Encourage locally-owned businesses and a farmers' market.
- **Start-Up Businesses:** Plan one or more locations dedicated to smaller, start-up businesses needing affordable spaces, whether in building trades, services or start-up manufacturing.
- **Separate Industry and Housing:** Separate industrial and residential traffic and other effects for the benefit of both land uses.
- **New Rail-Served Industrial Area:** Use a high degree of caution and skepticism when reviewing any proposal for a new rail-served industrial area. Establish in the immediate future stringent parameters and conditions that any such development must meet in order to gain City approval, annexation or utility service. Protect current and future housing, traffic flow, public safety, growth options, community image, water, air and City fiscal health.
- **Town Center:** Plan and zone for a walkable "town center" that includes retail, office, residential and civic elements.
- **Tax Base Density:** Achieve higher lot coverage for business or industry (and higher property tax revenue per acre).

Parks, Trails and Community Recreation

- **Park Diversity:** Plan a mixture of small, walk-in parks for neighborhood play and larger, drive-to parks for organized sports and community-wide or specialized activities. Continue to follow the 2005 *Parks and Trails Plan* and the 2016 *Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan*.
- **Elk River Access:** Provide access to and enjoyment of the Elk River by planning and developing one or more additional parks along the river. Link parks by public streets, sidewalks and/or paths in linear public open space.
- **Community Center:** Study the idea of building a community center for indoor recreation, exercise and meetings, but apply caution. Emphasize first using existing local facilities, including those owned by the School District or the City, and facilities in other cities. Evaluate the feasibility of constructing such a building without resorting to borrowing funds.

Neighborhood Design

- **Street Design:** During the planning process, the City will study the design of residential street corridors, including current regulations, pavement width, parking, boulevards, trees, sidewalks, house setbacks and garage setbacks. Local builders and emergency responders will be consulted. Policies will be determined at that time.
- **Street Connections:** Cul-de-sac streets will be allowed when necessary to serve difficult locations or protect natural resources, but most local residential streets will be interconnected for the sake of driving, walking and bicycling.
- **Housing Style Variety:** Promote variety in single-family housing styles in each neighborhood.

- **Northstar Neighborhood:** Amend the Northstar transit-oriented development plan to allow more housing and less retail business in that vicinity.

Housing

- **Guidelines for Multi-Family Housing:** Prepare and adopt voluntary guidelines for attached housing to promote visual compatibility with detached housing.
- **Housing Variety:** Plan for housing variety across the city to accommodate the needs of people in all stages of life and a wide range of incomes
- **Protect Single-Family Housing:** Ensure that the value and livability of single-family, detached housing is not harmed when trying to accommodate the need for other housing types.
- **Town Center Housing:** Allow housing above commercial spaces in the “town center.”

Utilities

- **City Services:** Require annexation to receive City sewer or water service.
- **Surface Water:** Prepare a comprehensive surface water plan.
- **Treatment Plant:** Study upgrading the wastewater treatment plant to accommodate city growth.

Natural Features

- **Wetlands and Floodplains:** Continue to enforce regulations on wetlands and floodplains. Require the restoration during development of wetlands that have been degraded by farming or other activities.
- **Elk River Protection:** Protect key resources in the Elk River corridor.
- **Forest Protection:** Limit the cutting of mature forest. Preserve to the extent practical the mature oak woods located east of the Hudson Woods neighborhood.

Conceptual Alternatives – Key Points

	Alternative A : Compact – Traditional	Alternative B: Spread - Suburban
Land Use and Growth Management	▪ Allow a mixture of lot sizes	▪ Require large minimum lot sizes
	▪ Adopt annexation review criteria; evaluate the risk of utility extension applications	▪ Accept all annexation petitions; approve all requests for utility extensions
	▪ Keep development compact and contiguous	▪ Keep density low and spread out
	▪ Plan a clustered and compact commercial pattern	▪ Emphasize continued east-west linear pattern of C-I pattern
	▪ Plan and zone locations for townhouses and apartments	▪ Minimize the development of townhouses and apartments
	▪ Plan a town center with intensive and walkable mix of business and housing	▪ Zone to discourage overly concentrated development
City Design	▪ Exercise tight control over design and development	▪ Allow developers to lead to lead in zoning, design and development; minimize City control
	▪ Require sidewalks along at least one side of all future streets; retrofit some areas	▪ Do not require sidewalks
	▪ Require narrower residential streets	▪ Continue the present width of residential streets
	▪ Require street trees in all new plats or other residential development	▪ Do not require street trees
	▪ Promote housing variety in most neighborhoods through zoning	▪ Separate all types of land use to the extent possible
	▪ Require interconnected streets and few cul-de-sacs	▪ Encourage cul-de-sacs and short loop streets
	▪ Driveways no more than 2 lanes wide at the property line	▪ Driveways as wide as the garage doors at the property line

	Alternative A : Compact – Traditional	Alternative B: Spread - Suburban
Streets and Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Require interconnected streets and few cul-de-sacs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage cul-de-sacs and short looped streets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allow more business discretion in setting parking quantities; allow more sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Zone for generous amounts of parking
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitate neighborhood and cross-town bicycling through public works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accommodate bicycling in parks and on sidewalks
Parks and Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build a park within walking distance of all homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasize large, community-level parks for organized recreation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a multi-jurisdictional park and trail plan generally along the Elk River corridor from Becker to Elk River
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The City plays an aggressive role in promoting commercial and industrial growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The City plays a minimal role in promoting commercial and industrial growth.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Zone only for offices, small shops and attractive industry in a compact pattern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Zone for all types and sizes of business and industry in all feasible locations
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adopt design guidelines for attached housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enforce only the Building Code
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan for housing variety in every major neighborhood
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allow, encourage or assist building affordable housing in Big Lake
Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protect key resources in the Elk River corridor 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Restore farmed wetlands during development 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limit cutting of mature forest 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to enforce regulations on wetlands and floodplains 	

