

Summary of Major Planning Issues

This volume of the *Comprehensive Plan* summarizes the major conditions and planning issues that were identified through the analyses of the various subjects.

Issues are defined as questions that should be discussed and debated during the comprehensive planning process and resolved in light of other issues.

Subsequent chapters of Volume One present the analyses of conditions and a more detailed discussion of issues for each planning topic. This information will help citizens and officials understand these and other issues and how they are interrelated.

Major Planning Issues

Each of the following issues – and others – are explained in their respective chapters of this Assessment of Conditions.

Demographics

- 1. Household Income and Employment:** What, if anything, should the City do to promote the growth of living-wage jobs, help raise average incomes and reduce the rate of unemployment or under-employment among Big Lake residents, particularly households with children?
- 2. Age Structure:** What should the City do to attract and retain more people in the 35 to 64-year-old age group, those in their prime earning years who are looking for move-up housing?
- 3. Regional and City Growth:** What additional steps should the City take, if any, to attempt to capture a portion of the projected population growth in the region?

- 4. Household Size and Housing Choices:** How should the Land Use Plan respond to the shrinking average size of households and the increased demand for multiple-family housing?
- 5. Growing Diversity:** What should the community do to successfully accommodate the expected increase in population diversity?

Natural Resources

- 1. Wetland Protection:** Can or should degraded or destroyed wetlands be restored and used as amenities in future neighborhoods?
- 2. Floodplain Use:** Should some portion of the Elk River floodplain be acquired for linear public park and trail? If so, which unit of government should lead in that effort, the County or the City? What should be their respective roles?
- 3. Protection during Development:** Can a sustainable balance be found between land development and natural resource protection?
- 4. Resource Stewardship:** How should we use what we have?

Land Use and Development

- 1. Protecting the Ability of the City to Grow Outward:** Will the County and Big Lake Township continue to cooperate with the City to protect the City's ability to growth outward in an efficient and economic fashion?
- 2. Annexation of Town Peninsulas:** What should be done, if anything, to encourage land owners in the several Township "peninsulas" to petition for annexation of their land to the City?
- 3. Fringe Development Pattern:** What should be the pattern of land use on the City's perimeter?

- 4. Favored Locations for Perimeter Growth:** What are the most efficient and beneficial locations for perimeter growth?
- 5. Locations for Multiple-Family Housing:** What are the best types of locations for multiple-family housing?
- 6. Types of New Housing:** Should the plan try to guide development towards or away from certain types of housing or let the market make that decision?
- 7. Appearance of New Multiple-Family Housing:** Should the City adopt design guidelines, or regulations, that help make attached housing more compatible with detached (single-family) housing?
- 8. New Neighborhood Design:** Should the City require that new residential areas be designed with many of the features of the older neighborhoods such as sidewalks, street trees, a mixture of housing types, narrower streets, short front setbacks and garages set back further than the façade of the house? Should there be regulations to soften the appearance of garage doors?
- 9. Downtown:** To what degree should the City promote and assist redevelopment that conforms with the recommendations of the downtown design guidelines for retail, offices, housing and mixed-use buildings? What should be the next major step forward for the downtown?
- 10. Waterfront Greenways:** Should the City acquire land for a linear public park and trail plus protected open space along the Elk River?
- 11. Economic Development, Jobs and Income:** What land use, zoning and development policy changes, if any, should be made to help promote economic development in Big Lake?
- 12. Commercial Growth:** How much land should be planned and zoned for retail business development? Should multiple-family housing be allowed in certain commercially-zoned locations?

Transportation System

- 1. Mississippi River bridges:** Should there be another bridge over the Mississippi River near Big Lake?
- 2. Potential rail yard-truck transfer facility:** How should Big Lake adjust its road system if a rail park emerges?
- 3. Direct access to and from US 10:** Should the City urge the Minnesota Department of Transportation to reduce the number of direct access driveways and intersections along Highway 10 in favor of a more complete frontage road system?
- 4. Lack of reasonably continuous travel routes across the city:** Can Big Lake adopt and follow a plan to require developers build a system of collector and minor arterial roads that connect across the city?
- 5. Local street design:** Should minor residential streets be built narrower than they have been in the past?
- 6. Sidewalks:** Should sidewalks be built on both sides of some future residential streets?
- 7. Trails:** How active should the City be in planning and building an interconnected system of off-road asphalt paths?

Parks and Trails Systems

- 1. Athletics Complex:** Should the City acquire land for and build an outdoor athletics complex for organized team sports? If so, where should it be and what should it include?
- 2. School Facilities:** Should the City forge a closer working relationship with the School District for shared facility use?
- 3. Neighborhood Parks:** Should there be more mid-sized, neighborhood parks in the 5 to 10-acre range?
- 4. Sidewalks:** Should there be more sidewalks in all parts of the city as an integral element of the walking and bicycling network, which would be supplemented by off-road, multiple-use paths? Should the City work to retrofit established neighborhoods with sidewalks?
- 5. Trails:** How aggressive should the City be in extending the many disconnected off-road paths?

Public Utilities and Surface Water

Sanitary Sewer Issues

- 1. Growth Locations:** Where are the most suitable locations to expand the sanitary waste system (and the city) based on cost, engineering feasibility, and environmental effects?
- 2. High-Demand Users:** Should system improvements be made to accommodate the high demand of a very small number of industrial users? How will this decision affect the city's economic development strategy?

Water Supply and Distribution Issues

- 1. Growth Locations:** Where are the most logical locations to expand the sanitary waste system based on cost, engineering feasibility, and environmental impacts?
- 2. System Improvements:** What enhancements to the existing water treatment and supply system would be required to serve all areas of the

city today and/or future areas of the city as it grows with additional residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional land uses?

Surface Water Management Issues

- 1. Planning:** Should the city prepare a comprehensive surface water management plan?

Economic Development

- 1. Economic Development, Transportation and Land Use:** Which areas should be developed, planned or preserved for business or industrial parks based on 9-ton or 10-ton access, rail development potential and reasonable access to sewer and water? What can the city do to avoid conflicting land use or transportation-related problems for business and industrial park tenants?
- 2. Business development:** What types of businesses does the city want to help grow? Attract? What actions and policies are needed to support business development?
- 3. Tax Base Development:** What, if anything, should the City do to strengthen its tax base and fiscal health? Should the city seek to strengthen its commercial/industrial tax base? What policies or strategies could the City use to enhance its tax base and fiscal health?
- 4. Workforce and talent attraction:** What strategies can the City use to create a community that attracts and retains talent attractive to area employers?
- 5. Redevelopment:** What role does redevelopment play in strengthening Big Lake? Which locations have priority for redevelopment during the next decade? What policies, tools or actions are needed to support redevelopment?
- 6. Transit oriented development:** What strategies will enable Big Lake to maximize the potential benefits of the Northstar Commuter Rail and Northstar CommuterLink service?

Housing

- 1. Move-Up Housing:** What should be done, if anything, to encourage the construction in the city of more for-sale housing in the “move-up” range of quality and cost?
- 2. Multiple-Family Housing:** Should the City encourage the construction of additional multiple-family housing? If so, where?
- 3. Housing Compatibility:** Should the City adopt design regulations to improve the visual compatibility between detached houses and townhouses or apartment buildings?
- 4. Full Range of Housing Prices:** What should be done to encourage the private market to provide decent and affordable housing for all families, households and individuals?