

# Introduction and Summary

## Scope and Purpose

This plan replaces the 1999 version as a guide for decisions about the growth of the City of Big Lake through 2040. The plan addresses all locations that may be part of Big Lake in 2040 plus the public facilities and services that support private investment.

The plan shows a sound and responsible pattern of growth and is meant to coordinate public and private development decisions.

The *Comprehensive Plan* is the basis for the City's subdivision regulations, official maps and amendments to the zoning ordinance and zoning map. The plan is a guide for the Council, Planning Commission and other advisors when they review development proposals and budget for improvements. The plan also guides public spending for roads, utilities, parks, housing and business growth.

## Planning Process

This plan was drafted by City staff with advice from a small team of consultants.

A committee of 24 citizens appointed by the City Council helped discover issues, verify the analysis, generate ideas and refine the recommendations. That group met monthly from May 2017 through March 2018. All of their meetings were open to the public. In addition, city-wide review and comment meetings were held in April, May and June of 2018.

## Document Organization

The central elements of the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan are the policies in each of the plan chapters.

The plan consists of two volumes:

- **The Assessment of Conditions and Issues**
- **Plans and Policies.**

A “concept plan” was prepared to make key decisions at the mid-point of the process. That document included general objectives or desired outcomes of the plan plus a very general map of future development. The Concept Plan is included as Appendix A.

The plan chapters, which each include policies, maps and action steps, provide policy direction on:

- Land use
- Transportation
- Natural and cultural resources
- Parks, trails and greenways
- Public utilities
- Economic development
- Plan implementation

## Goals and 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.

## **Plan Policies and Actions**

These are the major policies or actions recommended by the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Population and Demographics**

- Expect growth to slow from the pace of 1990 through 2008
- The 2015 population was approximately 10,300 while the 2040 forecast population is 13,100
- Expect a high proportion of young families
- Anticipate that many types of housing will be needed

### **Land Use and Growth Management**

- Achieve compact growth; reduce costs and preserve farm land
- Seek infill development
- Emphasize single-family housing
- Develop the Northstar neighborhood intensely
- Protect the lakeshore cottage district
- Create a “Town center” through redevelopment
- Expect to receive some petitions for annexation
- Extend sewer and water lines in the City only
- Coordinate land development with parks and trails
- Study a potential new industrial district on the west side
- Take a fiscally responsible approach.

### **Transportation System**

- Build a parkway system
- Build future local residential streets slightly narrower than what was done in the early 2000's
- Require sidewalks on one side of future residential streets
- Extend the bicycle path system
- Add some bicycling lanes

- Plant trees along Highway 10
- Greatly reduce or eliminate minimum off-street parking requirements for commercial and industrial development.

### **Economic Development**

- Plan and protect industrial areas
- Use commercial and industrial land efficiently
- Site a district for small industries and start-ups
- Use quality of life initiatives to attract a skilled workforce
- Offer competitive incentives

### **Natural Resources**

- Infiltrate and cleanse surface water runoff
- Protect surface water during development
- Keep portions of the parks natural
- Provide public access to the Elk River
- Work with County and private groups
- Protect wetlands and flood plains
- Limit the loss of trees and forest

### **Parks and Trails**

- Plan three more future parks along the Elk River
- Plan one neighborhood park in the south and two in the west
- Expand Hudson Woods Park, located on the eastern end of the city
- Plan for a major community park southeast of the Northstar station (100+ acres)
- Complete the improvements to River Oaks Park.

## Regional Location and Early Settlement

Big Lake is a free-standing city located along US Highway 10 in southeastern Sherburne County. It is not considered a suburb of Minneapolis as it is physically separated from the suburbs by undeveloped farmland but it is within the economic sphere of both the Twin Cities and the St. Cloud metropolitan areas. The city benefits from the State Highway 25 bridge over the Mississippi River at Monticello which gives it regional access by I-94 as well as Highway 10. Of the three cities between St. Cloud and Elk River – Clear Lake, Becker and Big Lake -- only Clear Lake has another such cross-river link.

Big Lake is entirely surrounded by Big Lake Township, as shown by Figure 10-1.

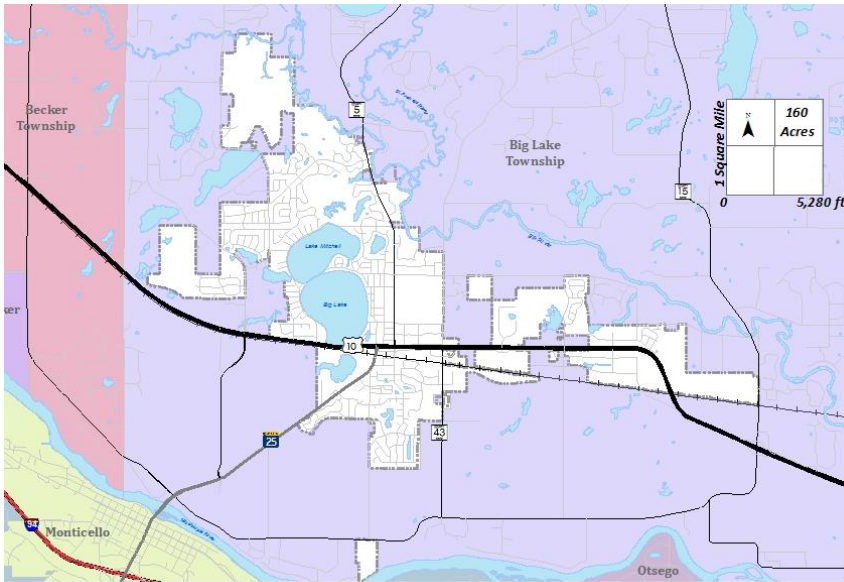


Figure 10-1: Regional Location of the City of Big Lake

Big Lake began as the settlement of Humboldt which was founded in the 1840's. The settlement benefited from its location along the Red River Ox Cart Trail, a route for southbound furs and hides from Winnipeg to St. Paul and northbound manufactured goods and supplies to the frontier.

One of the rest stops was Bailey Station, located near the present-day US Highway 10 and Sherburne County Highway 15. After Sherburne County was surveyed, the first land claim in Big Lake Township was in Section 26, near Bailey Station, by Andrew Chapman in 1851.

Early Big Lake benefited from a series of transportation improvements as the Military Road and later James J. Hill's Great Northern Railroad were constructed and provided access to the town. US Highway 10 was first known as Jefferson Highway and was originally a simple dirt path. Its paving in the early 1920's was a huge benefit for early automobile users and allowed for easy day trips from the Twin Cities.

Joseph Brown built a hotel at the present site of the city in the late 1840s, an institution that his family operated through several fires until the 1950s.

In the early 1900's, Mr. Brown's son George subdivided and sold his property on the shores of Big Lake for the development of vacation cabins. Other landowners soon followed suit which attracted many visitors and accelerated the growth of the town.

Fortunately for the community, a local group raised \$3,000 to purchase land for what is now Lakeside Park. Groups and families would travel by train or auto to Big Lake for a day or more of picknicking, swimming, baseball, dancing in the pavilion or vacationing on the shores of Big Lake. Big Lake was definitely on the map as a place to go for fun and relaxation in the country.

The settlement went by the name Humboldt until 1867. The City was incorporated in 1898, forty years after Minnesota became a state. (Stillwater, Minnesota's first city, was incorporated in 1854.) Big Lake's population in 1900 was just 177 people.

Other local history can be found in *A History of Big Lake*, which is available for reference at the Big Lake branch of the Great River Regional Library, located at 790 Minnesota Avenue, Big Lake.