

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Vision for the Future

The communities of rural Minnesota share many similar challenges. Our demographic profile is aging, as the baby boomers grow older. Young people continue to look for new opportunities in the cities, with a few returning to raise their families. Yet through it all, Cottonwood County has a civic pride uncommon in urban areas, with good schools and a growing labor force.



The county's infrastructure and public facilities are strong, with good transportation and utility networks, and quality public services. The rural water system is expanding, and other important utilities are in place. The grid of state, county and township roads moves local and regional traffic efficiently, although it is important to complete the four-lane sections of State Highway 60. Pro-active planning and investment will assure that infrastructure keeps pace with future needs.

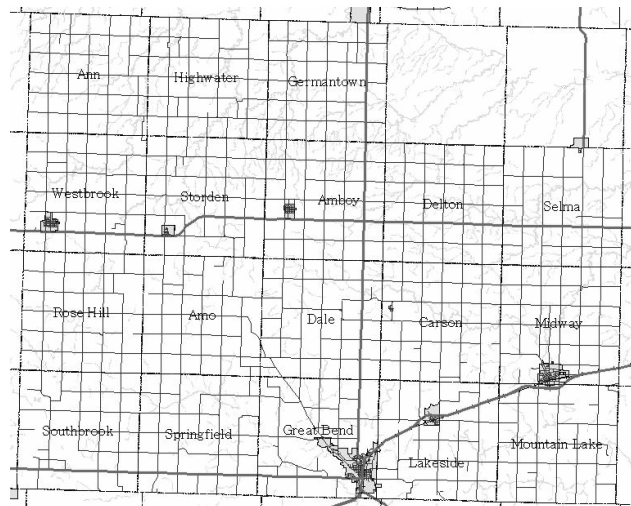
Cultural and recreational resources—festivals, cultural sites, natural areas and parks—add immeasurably to the rural quality of life. With increasing demands on volunteer time and limited budgets, cultural and historic resources must be carefully managed for future generations. Increasing demand for property in shoreland areas poses increasing challenges, while conservation of native grasslands and wildlife habitat also needs to be balanced to minimize land use conflicts.

Agriculture remains the mainstay of Cottonwood County's economic base. A strong local manufacturing sector, and affordable cost of living and a pro-growth attitude provide a springboard for future diversification. It is important to maintain rural space for agricultural expansion without crowding. Development in agricultural and natural areas can lead to sprawl and land use conflicts. For example, feedlot expansion has, at times, created conflicts with nearby residents. There are also concerns about the character of development along protected waters and wetlands.

A vital, growing community will work through conflicts to emerge a better place. This plan looks at how our community got to where it is today, where we want to go tomorrow, and how we can get the job done, working together.

The Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan is an official document, composed by a community in a public process, which guides decisions about future development and re-development. It is also the legal basis for adopting official development controls, such as the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations. A comprehensive plan typically looks out over a 20 year horizon, with updates every 5 years.



This *Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan* is the result of several years of effort, looking at the demography, infrastructure, resources, economy, housing and overall use of land in the county. In addition to providing background information for decision-making, the plan outlines goals and policies to implement the vision of the citizens of Cottonwood County for a better future. Finally, the plan details specific tasks that the County can undertake to move these ideals from vision into reality.

Goals & Policies

Goals are general statements that describe what the vision of the future looks like, or at least what we would like the future to look like. Each of these goals has specific policies (detailed in Chapter IX) which can be used to guide changes to zoning regulations and to direct future planning efforts. Applications for development review, such as conditional use permits or new subdivisions, should address how new projects contribute to meeting these goals and improving the quality of life in Cottonwood County.

Demographics

- ? Young people have opportunities to work and live in Cottonwood County.
- ? Residents return to rural Minnesota.
- ? The quality of life is maintained and improved for an increasing aging population.

Infrastructure & Public Facilities

- ? There is an adequate and safe water and wastewater system.
- ? There is a safe and efficient, multi-modal transportation system that meets local and regional needs.
- ? County's public buildings and facilities meet residents' needs.
- ? Public education is strong and innovative.
- ? Public safety services are provided to all residents.
- ? Adequate telecommunications and energy utilities are available to all residents.

Cultural & Recreational Resources

- ? Community cultural and historic points of interest are carefully managed for future generations.
- ? Peoples of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds are made welcome.
- ? Natural resources are preserved and protected.
- ? Development around lakes and streams is compatible with the natural environment.
- ? Parks and recreation areas provide a variety of opportunities for local residents.

Economic Development

- ? Agriculture will continue to be a significant economic activity.
- ? The local labor force will have the skills and education to compete for 21st century jobs.
- ? The existing economic base will become more diversified.
- ? New sources of renewable energy will be developed.

Housing

- ? Most housing will continue to be provided within cities where urban services are provided.
- ? Existing homes will be maintained and improved.
- ? There should be opportunities for limited rural housing where infrastructure is available.

Land Use

- ? Agriculture is a viable, permanent, productive land use.
- ? Commercial uses in rural areas are compatible with agricultural neighbors.
- ? Residential uses in rural areas are compatible with agricultural neighbors.
- ? Residential uses in rural areas are compatible with protected natural areas.
- ? Mining operations balance extraction with impacts to residential, agricultural and natural areas.
- ? Land Use Regulations are sensible, clear and easily available.
- ? The Development Review Process is fair, efficient and effective.