

II. INTRODUCTION

A modern comprehensive plan is a useful tool to make the most of change in the places we know and love. This document, the *Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan*, includes the detailed demographic and economic analysis of a land use plan. It considers the history, culture and recreational pursuits of local residents and visitors. And it establishes a vision 10, 20 even 30 years into the future, with goals, policies and tasks to implement that vision.

A. Context for Planning

A Comprehensive Plan for Cottonwood County, Minnesota, was prepared by Minneapolis planning consultants Nason, Wherman, Knight and Champman, Inc. in April 1970, with funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The County Zoning Ordinance was initially adopted in 1968, with multiple revisions since that time. A Land Use Policy Plan, adopted by ordinance in 1981, currently guides the County.

A.1. Legal Authority

Cottonwood County's legal authority to plan for and regulate the use of land is delegated by the Minnesota Legislature in statute. The state's former Local Planning Assistance Center explains that:

Minnesota Statutes § 394.21 specifically grants to all counties, except those in the defined seven county Metropolitan Area, the authority to "carry on county planning and zoning". Minnesota Statutes § 394.23 gives county boards the power and authority to prepare and adopt by ordinance, a comprehensive plan and "a comprehensive plan or plans when adopted by ordinance must be the basis for official controls adopted under the provisions of sections 394.21 to 394.37".

A.2. Planning Process

The current effort to compose a comprehensive plan for Cottonwood County began in 2001. This process has been led by the Cottonwood County Planning Commission and Environmental Office, involving citizens, community leaders, staff and public officials in countless hours of research, discussion, and consensus-building. The Southwest Regional Development Commission was brought on board in the fall of 2004 to facilitate composition of the final document.

The Cottonwood County Planning Commission recommended approval of the public review draft in the summer of 2005. The plan takes effect on official adoption by the Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners.

Changing conditions and preferences of the citizens of Cottonwood County may require amendments to the plan. The Planning Commission should review and update the document periodically, at the least every five years or sooner if necessary.