

Chapter 1. Introduction

Purpose and Scope

This *Comprehensive Plan* establishes a 20-year policy framework for the City addressing the needs of a maturing community. While the *2000 Comprehensive Plan* served as a foundation for this plan, many of the goals, policies and recommended actions were accomplished; therefore this new plan responds to changes that are anticipated in the community over the next 20 years. The Metropolitan Land Planning Act prompted this latest revision of the plan. This act required communities within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area to revise their comprehensive plans for conformity with regional system plans. However, the City also recognized that conditions of the community change over time and that goals, policies and actions need to change in response to new conditions.

The *Comprehensive Plan* is an official public document that serves as a policy guide for decision-making regarding the development of the community. Although it is a physical plan, it also is a reflection of the community's social and economic values. These values are translated into the type of land use the City desires and programs regarding economic development, housing, transportation, and other areas. The plan is also long range, covering a time period of twenty years. Since it is difficult to predict the changes that may occur over this time period, this document will have to be periodically reviewed and updated.

Benefits of Planning

Comprehensive planning benefits the community in many ways. The background data collection and analysis shows communities where they are today and helps to determine where they want to be in the future. Communities that plan are able to respond to change effectively. Planning allows communities to provide public facilities and services efficiently and cost-effectively. Planning also links implementation programs and strategies. In addition, the planning process helps to create ownership in the comprehensive plan by citizens and government officials.

Comprehensive planning enables communities to identify population characteristics, development trends and issues. This process involves the collection and analysis of background data including population, employment, housing, land use, transportation, community services, parks and natural resources. The analysis of this data enables the community to determine its current and future needs. Communities can then develop implementation strategies and programs to satisfy these needs. The administration of these implementation and strategies can then be coordinated and carried out effectively.

Planning decisions not only have an impact on land use but also affect the provision of public facilities and services. The ability to provide these facilities and services efficiently is one of the responsibilities of local government. Through this process, communities can determine what services are needed or will be needed in the future to meet the demands of its residents and businesses.

Communities that have not planned for the future are often at a disadvantage. Land use and public facility decisions by local officials become “ad-hoc”. This type of decision-making results in a number of problems including unmanaged land use; increased cost of public facilities and services that may serve scattered sites; the loss of natural resources; increased pollution and traffic problems; and property damage from improperly located development. The result is a community that does not offer a high quality of life for its residents.

To be effective, the comprehensive planning process should actively involve citizens. Citizen involvement creates ownership in the plan by the community. Local officials can then have confidence that decisions consistent with the plan have community support. Citizens become aware of the planning process and learn how to remain involved in the future.

Process

The Council looked to the existing advisory committees to be highly involved in the plan review process as it relates to their areas of expertise. The appropriate advisory committees and commissions, including the City Council, reviewed key components of the *Plan* throughout 2007 and 2008. These advisory groups identified issues, discussed and formulated policies and recommended actions that are included in the *Plan*.

In addition to the advisory committee/commission review, members of the public were invited to participate through open houses and the public hearing process. The Planning Commission is expected to hold a public hearing in the late summer or early fall, 2008.

Plan Elements

The *Comprehensive Plan* begins with background information that provided a base in the decision-making process. This background information includes the community’s guiding principles and community profile. The guiding principles describe the goals and values of the community. The community profile describes the City’s regional setting, history and demographics.

The *Plan* includes twelve other chapters addressing the following elements: land use, transportation, economic development, housing, community and cultural resources, community facilities and services, public safety and emergency management, parks and open space, natural resources, resource conservation, intergovernmental coordination and implementation. Each chapter discusses existing conditions and issues within the City, provides an analysis of needs, and establishes goals, policies and recommended actions. Intergovernmental coordination describes the City’s relationship with adjacent communities and other governmental agencies. The final chapter, Implementation, describes how the goals, policies, and recommended actions will be implemented during the life of the *Plan*.